



Christ in the Canticles.

The Canticles
OF THE
Song of Solomon :
A METRICAL PARAPHRASE
WITH
EXPLANATORY NOTES
AND
PRACTICAL COMMENTS.

BY THE
REV. JOSEPH BUSH, M.A.,
VICAR OF ORMSKIRK.

*DEDICATED, BY PERMISSION, TO THE VENERABLE
THE ARCHDEACON OF LIVERPOOL.*

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DEDICATED,
BY HIS PERMISSION,
TO
THE VENERABLE JOHN JONES, M.A.,
ARCHDEACON OF LIVERPOOL,
WITH THE RESPECTS AND KIND REGARDS
OF THE AUTHOR.

P R E F A C E .

THE Author of the present work has adopted Dr. Good's division of the Song of Solomon into twelve Canticles—each Canticle containing a subject in itself, though with a certain bearing upon the general subject.

The method pursued in the work is this :

1. A plan or sketch of each Canticle.
2. The authorised and revised versions, with a Metrical Paraphrase.
3. Explanatory Notes.
4. Practical Comments.

In the "Metrical Paraphrase," the Author has endeavoured to give an English dress to the oriental style; retaining, as far as practicable, the words of the English version; and only supplying so much of new matter, as might make the meaning more clear and intelligible to the English reader.

In the "Explanatory Notes," he has availed himself of all the materials within his reach, which might serve to illustrate the manners and customs of those times and countries, which are referred to in the Song; thus throwing upon things ancient, and therefore obscure, what light may have been obtained by modern research and discovery.

In the "Practical Comments," his study has been to avoid all those fanciful interpretations, and minute applications of Scripture, which may be called over-spiritualizing—a practice from which the Song of

Solomon has especially suffered. He has endeavoured rather to make this "Song of Songs" a vehicle for conveying to the mind sound and sober views of divine truth ; and at the same time a medium of illustrating and describing real Christian experience.

The Author would thankfully acknowledge the pleasure, and he trusts the profit also, which he has himself derived from the researches involved in the preparation of his "Explanatory Notes" and "Practical Comments." The direct assistance, which he has received from the labours of others, who have gone before in the same field, will be found acknowledged in the several places where the quotations occur.

For the "Metrical Paraphrase," with all the defects which doubtless belong to it, he must be held solely responsible ; and can only indulge the hope that it may not altogether fail of its design, which is to render this sacred Hebrew poem more clear and intelligible to English readers.

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
ON THE
DRAMATIC FORM OF THE SONG—ITS POETICAL STYLE—
AND ITS ALLEGORICAL CHARACTER.

WE do not propose, in these brief introductory remarks, to enter upon any discussion, either as to the authorship, or as to the inspiration of what is sometimes called the “Book of Canticles,” but more generally the “Song of Solomon.”

We shall take it for granted that Solomon was indeed the author of this Song—that he wrote it as he was “moved by the Holy Ghost”—and therefore that it forms part of those “Holy Scriptures, which have been written for our learning;” and which, being “given by inspiration of God,” are “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

The remarks, then, which we have to offer on this sacred Song, will be directed to the following points—1, its broken and dramatic form; 2, its poetical style; 3, its allegorical character.

And first with regard to its

BROKEN AND DRAMATIC FORM.

As arranged in our authorised version, it appears in the form of one unbroken piece or poem—the divisions into

chapters being rather with a view to convenience of reading, than with any reference to the subject-matter. And this no doubt has contributed in no small degree to the apparent confusion, and consequent obscurity, which have hitherto enveloped this Sacred Book, and which have led to its being less interesting to the reader, and less useful, than it otherwise might have been.

In opposition however to this view, that the "Song of Solomon" is one continuous piece or poem, we have adopted the other view, which regards it as made up of several distinct and separate pieces, though all bearing upon one and the same object. There is good evidence to shew that this was the view entertained by the ancient commentators, both Jewish and Christian ; though, after the lapse of ages, it has only recently been revived ; especially by Dr. Percy, Bishop of Dromore ; and by Dr. Good, author of "Song of Songs," or "Sacred Idyls."

"The Song of Songs," he writes, "cannot be one connected epithalamium, since the transitions are too abrupt for the wildest flights of the oriental muse, and evidently imply a variety of openings and conclusions."

"It is the object, therefore, of the present version," he continues, "to offer a new arrangement, and to regard the entire song as a collection of distinct idyls upon one common subject. In forming this arrangement, I have followed no other guide than what has appeared to me the intention of the sacred bard : I have confined myself to soliloquy where the speaker gives no evident proofs of a companion, and I have introduced dialogue where the responses are obvious. I have finished the idyl where the subject seems naturally to close, and I have re-commenced it where a new subject is introduced. Thus divided into a number of little detached poems,

I trust that many of the obscurities, which have hitherto overshadowed this unrivalled relique of the eastern pastoral, have vanished completely.

“The Arabian poet, Teman, has happily compared the arrangement of beautiful thoughts in verse to a string of pearls; and the Persian Hafis, in the last stanza of one of his most exquisite odes, pursuing the same idea, asserts that he has now ‘strung his pearls.’ This elegant conception is probably of Hebrew origin, for the Hebrew word, here and elsewhere translated *song*, means in its original acceptation ‘a *string or chain*.’ The different idyls, therefore, presented in this collection, were probably regarded by the sacred poet, at the time of their composition, as so many distinct beads or pearls, of which the whole when strung together constitute one complete string; and, as before observed, on account of their supreme excellence above all the other poetic strings he had ever exhibited, he distinguished them by the illustrious appellation of ‘string of strings,’ or ‘song of songs.’”—*Good’s Preface.*

The Rev. J. Fry, following Dr. Good in the adoption of this view, says, “The plural appellation given to this song among the Latins, ‘*Cantica Salomonis*’ (whence our English term ‘Canticles’) seems to argue that they considered it as a collection of several songs, and not as one continued poem. The title also given to it in the Chaldee Targum, which is the oldest Jewish commentary upon this portion of Scripture, affords still more remarkable evidence: ‘*The Songs and Hymns, which Solomon the Prophet, the King of Israel, uttered in the Spirit of Prophecy before the Lord.*’ Not to mention that, according to the opinion of some Hebrew scholars, the title of the book, as it stands in the original Hebrew, which has been usually rendered ‘The Song of Songs,’ and understood to signify the most excellent of songs,

should be translated ‘*A Series of Songs*,’ or a ‘Song made up of Songs.’”

It is this which has led us to use the term “*broken*,” as applying to the “Song of Solomon”—the fact of its being composed, not as one continuous whole, but as a collection or series of distinct and separate pieces, though all bearing upon one common object.

In addition to this view as to the original division of the poem into distinct canticles or idyls, we have also adopted the view, now generally received, that it was originally cast in the *dramatic* form—it being clear that more persons than one are introduced, that a regular dialogue is kept up, and that there is a chorus similar, in the part which it takes, to that of the ancient Greek drama.

Bishop Gray, in his “Key to the Old Testament,” writes concerning the Song of Solomon, “This book may be considered, as to its form, a dramatical poem of the pastoral kind. There is a succession of time, and a change of place to different parts of the palace and royal gardens. The personages introduced as speakers are the bridegroom and bride, with their respective attendants, together (as some suppose) with the sister of the bride. There is certainly an interchange of dialogue, carried on in a wild and digressive manner, and the speeches are characteristic, and adapted to the persons with appropriate elegance. The companions of the bride compose a kind of chorus, which seems to bear some resemblance to that which afterwards obtained in the Grecian tragedy. Solomon and his bride sometimes speak in assumed characters, and represent themselves in fictitious circumstances. They descend, as it were, from the throne; and adopt, with the pastoral dress, that simplicity which is favourable to the communication of their sentiments.”

Bishop Lowth, in his very interesting “Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews,” remarks :—“The term *Dramatic Poetry* is now restricted to two particular species of composition, Tragedy and Comedy. It was originally, however, of much more extensive signification ; it regarded simply the external form ; it was properly applied to every poem composed in dialogue ; provided that, throughout the whole the conversation was carried on by the characters themselves, without the intervention of the poet.” The Song of Solomon is adduced by the Bishop as an example of this kind of composition. He speaks of it as an “epithalamium or nuptial dialogue. It is expressive of the utmost fervour, as well as of the utmost delicacy of passion ; it is instinct with all the spirit and with all the sweetness of affection. The principal characters are Solomon himself and his Bride, who are represented as speaking, sometimes in dialogue when they are together, and sometimes in soliloquy when accidentally separated. Virgins also, the companions of the bride, are introduced, who seem to be constantly on the stage, and bear a part in the dialogue. Mention also is made of young men, as friends of the bridegroom. This is exactly conformable to the manners of the Hebrews, who had always a number of companions to the bridegroom, thirty of whom were present in honour of Sampson at his nuptial feast. In the New Testament, according to the Hebrew idiom, they are called ‘children’ (or sons) ‘of the bride-chamber,’ and ‘friends of the bridegroom ;’ there too we find mention of ten virgins, who went forth to meet the bridegroom, and to conduct him home ; which circumstances, I think, indicate that this poem is founded upon the nuptial rites of the Hebrews, and is expressive of the forms or ceremonial of their marriages.” Comp. Ps. 45, v. 15, &c.

Bishop Percy’s ideas on this subject, agreeing for the most

part with those of Bishop Lowth, are thus expressed :—“The form of this poem is *dramatic*, as appears from the changes of address, which occur in every page. That the poem does not consist of one single undivided dialogue, but is *broken* into several parts, is evident. Some have endeavoured to find in it the exact model of the Grecian drama : they have divided the whole into five regular acts, and fancied they have discovered all the unities of Time and Place and Action. Others again have imagined it to consist of several distinct unconnected Eclogues, which bear no more relation to each other than so many pastorals of Virgil or Theocrites.

“ But whoever examines this poem with attention will be convinced that it is not a regular Drama according to the Grecian rules on the one hand—nor a parcel of distinct unconnected Pastorals on the other. He will find that it is broken into more parts than five ; and that those parts have a mutual relation and dependance ; for the dialogue is carried on by the same speakers, and the same subject is continued through them all. Yet on the other hand there is no appearance of dramatic unity, according to the severe standard of the Grecian critics ; there is no one great event, to which every thing tends ; there are no striking reverses of fortune, or important catastrophe ; no fable or plot in the unravelling of which the poem is wound up ; there are some passages, which denote a change of place ; and others an alteration of time. One while we are in the royal apartments ; another while in search of the shepherds’ tents. Sometimes in one part of the gardens, and sometimes in another. And so in one place the morning is characterised, in another the evening : sometimes the adventures of the day are recounted ; sometimes we have a recital of those of the night.”

Having thus then explained the views which we have adopted as to the originally broken and dramatic form of

this Song of Songs, or rather Series of Songs or “Canticles,” we proceed to notice briefly in the next place its

POETICAL STYLE.

There can be no doubt that the Song of Solomon belongs to that style of poetry, which is usually termed the amatory style. It is of the nature of a love-poem. It describes in the liveliest and warmest manner the feelings of two persons deeply attached to each other. A Bridegroom and Bride are introduced to our notice. Sometimes they are brought before us as persons in the highest rank of life, a King and his Consort—sometimes as persons of an inferior degree, a Shepherd and Shepherdess. But at all times they are represented as being influenced by the deepest and warmest feelings of attachment to each other. Thus we have their mutual declarations of love. We have their high-flown expressions of admiration and praise one toward another. We have their occasional separations, and the pain which is caused thereby ; and we have the happiness which is experienced, when these painful separations are ended ; together with other circumstances connected with the marriage union, according to the customs, which prevailed in those early times, and in those eastern countries.

Thus the Song of Solomon is evidently of the nature of a love-poem, composed on the occasion of some marriage, either real or fictitious. And therefore the style of the song, in accordance with its subject, is that which is usually termed the amatory style.

Some indeed on this very ground have objected to it, as giving too much licence to the imagination on a subject requiring the greatest care and delicacy in its treatment. But the same motto may well be inscribed on the portals of this song, as even the heathen Romans were accustomed to

inscribe upon their temples, “Far hence be the profane.” One of the commentators on this song has well observed :—“ Profane minds may ridicule images borrowed from conjugal affections and embraces, as if these were something impure or improper ; but the Author of this ‘ holy estate of marriage ’ hath sanctified it by His appointment, His blessing, and the adoption of these images in many parts of Scripture ; and what God hath cleansed let no man call common or unclean.”

Bishop Gray likewise remarks on this part of our subject :—“ Those, who imagine that Solomon has introduced into this hymeneal song some ideas inconsistent with refinement, do not sufficiently consider that the strongest affections of the mind, if properly directed, are chaste and honourable. The reciprocal description of the bridegroom and bride, and the impassioned language in which they express their mutual attachment, are consistent with the strictest purity of conception.”

To these very just remarks may be added those of Bishop Percy, who writes :—“ The subject of the Song of Solomon appears to be the loves of that celebrated Hebrew monarch and some very beautiful person, who is called Shulamith, or bride of Solomon, his spouse, his sister, his love, his fair one. It describes several particulars of their nuptials, and celebrates no loose amours, but that holy wedded love, which allowably glows in the chastest bosom.”

These ideas, so true and just in themselves, could not possibly be expressed with more force and beauty than in the following lines of Milton :—

Hail, wedded love, mysterious law, true source
Of human offspring, sole propriety
In Paradise of all things common else !
By thee adulterous lust was driven from men

Among the bestial herds to range ; by thee
Founded in reason, loyal, just, and pure,
Relations dear, and all the charities
Of father, son, and brother, first were known.
Far be it, that I should write thee sin or blame,
Or think thee unbefitting holiest place,
Perpetual fountain of domestic sweets,
Whose bed is undefiled and chaste pronounced,
Present, or past, as saints and patriarchs used.
Here Love his golden shaft employs, here lights
His constant lamp, and waves his purple wings,
Reigns here and revels.—*Paradise Lost*, Book 4, v. 750.

But we may observe further, with regard to the style of Solomon's Song, that its figures and language are borrowed chiefly from *pastoral* life, and from the objects of nature, with which such a life is conversant.

"The style," says Bishop Gray, "is not more simple than elegant. The poem indeed abounds throughout with beauties, and presents everywhere a delightful and romantic display of nature, painted at its most interesting season with all the enthusiasm of poetry, and described with every ornament that an inventive fancy could furnish. The images that embellish it are chiefly drawn from that state of pastoral life, in which the Jews were much occupied ; and to which Solomon, mindful of his father's condition, must have looked with peculiar fondness."

"Every part of the Canticles," says Bossuet, "abounds in poetical beauties ; the objects which present themselves on every side are such as these—the choicest plants, the most beautiful flowers, the most delicious fruits, the bloom and vigour of spring, the sweet verdure of the fields, flourishing and well-watered gardens, pleasant streams, and perennial fountains. The other senses are represented as regaled with the most precious odours, natural and artificial ; with the sweet singing of birds, and the soft voice of the turtle-dove ;

with milk and honey, and the choicest of wine. To these enchantments are added all that is beautiful and graceful in the human form ; the endearments, the caresses, the delicacy of love. If any object is introduced, which seems not to harmonise with this delightful scene, such as the awful prospect of tremendous precipices ; the wilderness of the mountains ; or the haunts of lions ; its effect is only to heighten by contrast the beauty of the other objects, and to add the charms of variety to those of grace and elegance."

Not less just than eloquent are these descriptions of the *poetical style* of the Song of Solomon ; combining, as that style does, the "amatory" and the "pastoral." We have now in the last place to consider briefly its

ALLEGORICAL CHARACTER.

That this "Song of loves," as it may well be called—agreeably with the title given to a kindred song, the 45th Psalm—should have only a literal meaning, and not an allegorical, would be contrary to the almost universal judgment both of Jewish and of Christian commentators.

"Far be it ! far be it !" says one of the Hebrew doctors, "that the 'Song of Songs' should treat of earthly love ; for had it not been a pure allegory, and had not its excellence been great, it would not have been numbered with the holy books ; nor on this head is there any controversy."

"That this fine Eastern pastoral was designed for a vehicle of religious truths, is an opinion handed down from the earliest antiquity. That it *may be* so has been clearly proved by one of the best critics of the age (Dr. Lowth) ; and that it *is* so may be strongly presumed, not only from that antient and universal opinion, but from its being preserved in a book, all whose other contents are of a divine religious nature."—*Bp. Percy.*

"It has been a question in all ages, whether the literal and obvious meaning of these sacred amores be the whole that was intended by the royal bard; or whether they do not afford at the same time the veil of a sublime and mystical allegory. For myself I unite in the opinion of the illustrious Lowth, and believe such a sublime and mystic allegory to have been fully intended by the sacred bard."—*Dr. Good.*

Now the object of such an allegory is to represent heavenly and spiritual things under the figure of things earthly and literal—or to convey some idea of the feelings of the divine mind towards ourselves, by describing them in the language of our own human feelings one toward another. Viewing the Song of Solomon in this light, the question arises, how is the allegory to be interpreted?—what spiritual and heavenly things are shadowed forth in it?—what idea of the divine feelings towards us is intended to be conveyed by it?

On this point various conjectures have been offered, and different opinions entertained. We shall refer to only one of these opinions, which we believe to be the true one; and which supposes that (under the figure of a Bridegroom and his Bride) the union and mutual love, which subsist between Christ and his Church, are here meant to be represented.

The same figure we find frequently thus employed in Scripture—in the New Testament as well as in the Old.

We find, for instance, John the Baptist expressly speaking of Christ in this way as the Bridegroom, and of himself as the Bridegroom's friend. "Ye yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice; this my joy therefore is fulfilled."—*John, ch. 3, v. 27, 28.*

We find Christ himself also employing the same terms, when he explained to the disciples of John why his own disciples fasted not, viz., because *he*, the Bridegroom, was then with them. “And Jesus said unto them, can the children of the bridechamber mourn as long as the Bridegroom is with them? but the days will come when the Bridegroom will be taken away, and then shall they fast.”—Matt., ch. 9, v. 15.

We find St. Paul likewise writing to the Corinthian Church in the same figurative language:—“For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.—2 Cor., ch. 11, v. 2. And in his Epistle to the Ephesians he expressly refers to the marriage state as representing the union between Christ and his Church—and upon that high and holy ground he urges husbands and wives to the faithful discharge of their relative duties one toward another; “wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church; and he is the saviour of the body. As therefore the Church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. That he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church. For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and

mother, and be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great *mystery*: but I speak concerning Christ and his Church.”—Ephes., ch. 5, v. 22-32.

We find the same figure used too in several places in the Revelation of St. John, and especially in that remarkable passage :—“ Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him : for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white : for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he said unto me, write, ‘ Blessed are they which are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ ”—Rev., ch. 19, v. 7, 8, 9.

Thus we have abundant Scriptural warrant for interpreting this sacred allegory as intended to shadow forth to us the “mystical union, which is betwixt Christ and his Church,” to describe the mutual love which subsists between them, and the happiness which they find in communion and fellowship with each other. This is well, though quaintly, expressed in the preface to the Bible which was in use in Queen Elizabeth’s time :—“ In this song, Solomon, by most sweet and comfortable allegories and parables, describeth the perfect love between Jesus Christ, the true Solomon and King of Peace, and the faithful of his Church, which he hath sanctified and appointed to be his spouse ; holy, chaste, and without reprobation ; so that here is declared the singular love of the bridegroom toward the bride, and his great and excellent benefits wherewith he doth enrich her, of his pure bounty and grace, without any of her deservings. Also the earnest affection of the Church, which is inflamed with the love of Christ, desiring to be more and more joined to him in love, and not to be forsaken for any spot or blemish that is in her.”

But we may here remark that as the Church is a “congregation of faithful men,” a collection of individual believers, it must therefore be understood that what is spoken of the Church at large, is not only true of it in its collective capacity, but also may with equal truth be applied to each individual member of the same.

Thus every Christian believer, being a true member of the Church of Christ, may (in a spiritual sense) be regarded as the Bride, on whom the love of Christ is set, and whose love is set on Christ in return; as it is said by St. John, “we love him, because he first loved us”—or as it is said by St. Peter, “whom not having seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” To such believing souls Christ is precious—“unto you therefore which believe he is precious.” —1 Pet., ch. 2, v. 7. To such he “manifests himself, as he does not unto the world”—to such his spiritual visits are indeed delightful, “times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord,” the earnest and foretastes of heavenly bliss—and to such, when the Saviour for the time withdraws his visits, and withdraws his presence, it is a source of sorrow and disquietude, and leads them to seek him more earnestly and diligently, until they find him, and once more enjoy sweet communion with him.

Thus the inward and heart-felt experience of the faithful Christian will correspond very much with that of the Spouse, or Bride, in the Song of Solomon. Christ will be to *him*, as to *her*, the “beloved” of his soul—the “chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely”—the object of his highest admiration—the subject of his constant praise. He will enjoy the Saviour’s presence; he will mourn his absence; he will seek Him where He is to be found, and will not rest satisfied until he finds Him; and the “blessed hope,” to which

he looks forward, is that future and perfect union with Christ in heaven, when he shall indeed be with Him where he is to "behold His glory," and to be separated from Him no more for ever.

It is on this principle that our interpretation and application of the Song of Solomon will proceed—as representing the union and mutual love which subsist, not only between Christ and his Church in general, but also between Christ and each individual soul, which by faith is united to him, and which is sanctified by his indwelling Spirit. This love of the soul toward Christ, I need scarcely say, forms a necessary and essential part of the true Christian character—a love produced by the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us (for the "fruit of the Spirit is love"), and arising from a sense of Christ's love manifested towards us, as well as from a lively perception of His own intrinsic excellence and beauty.

If there be not something of this personal love toward the Saviour, influencing both the heart and the life, what evidence can there be to shew that we have the Spirit of Christ? and "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his."

What was the Saviour's own appeal to Peter after his fall? What was the test, three times repeated, which he applied—and what was the evidence, three times given, which was required—"Simon, son of Jonas, *lovest thou me?*"—"Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I *love thee*."

What was the Apostle Paul's distinguishing mark, whereby all true Christians might be known from mere Christian professors—"Grace be with all them that *love* our Lord Jesus Christ, in sincerity"—and "If any man *love not* the Lord Jesus Christ let him be Anathema, Maranatha."

What was the Apostle's own presiding and prevailing motive, the mainspring of his obedience, the incentive to his

multiplied labours—"for the *love* of Christ," he says, "constraineth us."

Our conclusion then is this, that as love to Christ forms a necessary and essential part of the true Christian character, so the Song of Solomon may be viewed as the divinely inspired language of that love, in which the renewed and sanctified soul may express its feelings of admiration and regard towards the Saviour. And the great practical benefit, which as Christians we may derive from the study of this sacred song, is the stirring up of our souls to more ardent love; that Christ may become more and more, what he ought to be, the centre of our souls' affections and desires; and that we may be able to say of Christ with all sincerity and truth, "This is my beloved, and this is my friend,"—"Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee."

The author of the following Paraphrase and Exposition earnestly hopes and prays that, by God's blessing, such may be the effect produced on his own heart, and on the hearts of his readers, by this humble endeavour to contribute something to the better understanding of the "Song of Songs, which is Solomon's."

THE CLAIMS OF THE SONG OF SOLOMON
TO FORM PART OF THE
CANON OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

It seems but proper that, before proceeding to the exposition of this “Song of Songs,” some notice should be taken of the claims which it possesses to a place in the sacred Canon. And this is the more important as probably there is no other part of the inspired Volume, to which the Infidel would point with a more confident and malicious air of triumph; and in the defence of which the humble Christian, unversed perhaps in such arguments, would experience a greater diffidence.

It shall be our object therefore to present, in a short compass, and gathered from the best sources within our reach, the evidence on which these claims may be supported; and to shew on what grounds the “Song of Solomon” is entitled to be placed among the sacred and canonical writings. And we may say at once that its claims to this position are of no inferior character; that they rest upon no uncertain or unsafe ground, but on that which is sure and solid—not upon the ground of any mere private opinion, but of the general consent and sanction of the Church, both Jewish and Christian. Thus it strictly complies with the rule laid down for such cases by the Church of England in her sixth Article, where she says, “In the name of Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church.”

The evidence required for the proof of this we find ready to our hand, very carefully collected, as well as very clearly and concisely stated, in that well-known and useful work, Horne’s “Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures.” The substance of what he says upon the subject is as follows:

“If the Canon of the Hebrew Scriptures was settled by Ezra (which we have already seen was most probably the case), there can be no doubt but that the Song of Solomon is a sacred book; for, to use the strong language of Bishop Warburton, ‘Ezra wrote, and we may

believe acted, by the inspiration of the most High, amid the last blaze indeed, yet in the full lustre of expiring prophecy. And such a man would not have placed any book that was not sacred in the same volume with the law and the prophets.' In addition to this evidence, the following considerations will authorize us to infer that the Song of Solomon was, from the most early period, deemed a sacred book ; and ranked with the Hagiographa or Holy writings of the Jews ; and thence was received among the canonical books of the Old Testament.

A Greek translation of it is extant, which without contradiction is ascribed to the Jewish authors of the Septuagint, who flourished about two centuries before Christ, and which still forms a part of the Alexandrian version. Further, that the antient Jews, without exception, considered it as a divinely inspired production, appears from the allegorical signification annexed to it in the Chaldee Paraphrase. Josephus, in his answer to Apion, gives a catalogue of the Jewish books, and in the third class of such as related to moral instruction includes this Song."

Thus it is undeniably certain that the Song of Solomon was admitted by the Jewish Church into its Canon of holy Scripture. The inference therefore, which we may fairly draw from this is, that when our Saviour spake of the Scriptures to the Jews (himself also being a Jew), saying, "Search the Scriptures—for they are they, which testify of me;" he would naturally, and even necessarily, include this portion of the Jewish Canon, the Song of Solomon. It is true that he nowhere directly quotes from it ; but many of his references and illustrations are such as quite agree with the ideas and scope of the Song ; and have led some to suppose that he made an actual allusion to it, though not a direct quotation from it. An instance of this is the Parable of the Ten Virgins, going forth to meet the Bridegroom—and again the place where he says, with regard to his disciples, "Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn while the Bridegroom is with them?" John the Baptist likewise not improbably had the Song of Solomon in view, when he speaks of Christ as the Bridegroom of the Church, and of himself as the Bridegroom's friend. John 3, v. 29. "He that hath the Bride is the Bridegroom ; but the friend of the Bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice : this my joy therefore is fulfilled."

Bishop Burnet remarks, "Christ does often cite Moses and the Prophets ; he appeals to them ; and though he charged the Jews of that time, chiefly their teachers and rulers, with many disorders and faults, yet he never once so much as insinuated that they had corrupted their law, or other sacred books ; which, if true, had been the greatest of all

those abuses that they had put upon the people. Our Saviour cited their books according to the Septuagint translation that was then in credit and common use amongst them. He also cites the Old Testament by a threefold division of the ‘law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms;’ according to the three orders of books into which the Jews had divided it.”

Now the “*Psalms*,” according to the Jewish arrangement, included the Song of Solomon ; which must therefore have been included by our Saviour himself, when he cited the Jewish Scriptures under the above threefold division.

But turn we now from the testimony of the Jewish Church to that of the Christian, which will be found equally clear and conclusive to the point in hand.

“ From the Jewish synagogue this book (the Song of Solomon) was received into the Christian Church without any doubt of its divine authority. It occurs in the catalogue of books of the Old Testament made by Melito, Bishop of Sardis, in Lydia ; who is placed by Cave about the year 170 ; who travelled into Palestine on purpose to learn the number of these books, and who made the first catalogue of the Hebrew Scriptures. It is cited by Ignatius, who had been a disciple of the Apostle St. John about the beginning of the second century, as a book of authority in the Church at Antioch. With a conviction of the sacred character of the work it was rendered into Greek, in the second century, by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion. Origen, who wrote early in the third century, on the authority of those learned Jews, who were co-temporary with him, and whom he was in the habit of consulting respecting the authority and literal import of their sacred books, inserted it in his Hexapla ; and wrote some homilies upon it explaining its mystical sense, which have in part been translated into Latin by Jerome. It is enumerated in the list of canonical books occurring in the synopsis attributed to Athanasius, who flourished in the third century ; and in the catalogues of Jerome and Rufinus, towards the close of the fourth century ; in which also we find it cited in the Apostolical Constitutions, and also in the Apostolical Canons ; since which time the Song of Songs has maintained its place in the sacred Canon.”

Such is the united testimony of both Jewish and Christian authorities to this point ; and such is the strong ground, on which the claims of the Song of Solomon rest. The Church, which is expressly declared to be a “ witness and keeper of holy writ,” has always given a place to this Song in its list of sacred books. And this fact is the more striking, when we consider that the claims of some other books to a

similar place have been tried by the Church, and found wanting ; and have consequently been rejected. We refer to those books, which are commonly called the Apocrypha, and which have never been admitted by the Church Universal, either Jewish, or Christian, into the sacred Canon. This rejection of certain other claims, as being false and unfounded, serves to give additional strength and value to those claims, which are admitted—shewing, as it does, that they have not been admitted without due care, and without proper examination of the evidence on which they professedly stand. The Song of Solomon has borne the scrutiny, and stood the test.

Bishop Patrick, in the Preface to his Commentary on this Song, remarks, “That it was always looked upon as a holy book, treating of some spiritual and divine matters, appears from its being placed among the rest of that kind. Nor hath it been doubted by any considerable number of men, either among Jews or Christians, but only by a few singular persons ; who ought (as Theodoret speaks in his preface to this book) to have looked upon those blessed fathers, who, placing this Song among the divine writings, took it to be fit for the uses of the Church, as men of greater judgment and more spiritual than themselves. And they ought likewise to have considered (as he adds) that we have, in effect, the testimony of the Holy Ghost itself for its divine authority ; Ezra, a man excelling in virtue, and full of the Holy Spirit, having thought this worthy of a room among those sacred volumes, which he gathered together after their return from the captivity of Babylon.

And, accordingly, a great many holy men have illustrated it (as he further notes) with their commentaries and interpretations, or have adorned their writings with its sentences. Such as Eusebius, Origen, Cyprian (who wore the crown of martyrdom), and others that were more antient than these, and nearer to the times of the Apostles.”

We may safely conclude, then, with such an amount of evidence before us, and with such an array of authorities of no mean name, that the Song of Solomon is indeed justly entitled to its place in the sacred Canon, and forms part of those “holy Scriptures,” of those “oracles of God,” which were once committed to the Jews, and by them have been handed down to us in all their integrity, to be ever hereafter kept as a sacred deposit in the Church of God, and to form the subject of pious and prayerful study to God’s children in all ages, for their edification and comfort, even to the end of time.

SUBJECTS OF THE TWELVE CANTICLES.

I.

THE BRIDE IN THE KING'S CHAMBERS.

II.

THE BRIDEGROOM AND THE BRIDE TOGETHER IN THEIR GARDEN RETREAT.

III.

THE BRIDEGROOM'S CALL TO THE BRIDE, AND HER RESPONSE TO THE CALL.

IV.

THE BRIDE'S MIDNIGHT SEARCH AFTER HER BELOVED.

V.

THE BRIDEGROOM'S STATE-VISIT TO THE BRIDE, AND HIS DESCRIPTION OF HER BEAUTIES.

VI.

THE BRIDE COMPARED TO A LOVELY GARDEN, OR PARADISE.

VII.

THE BRIDE'S PORTRAIT OF THE BRIDEGROOM, AND HIS DESCRIPTION OF HER IN REPLY.

VIII.

THE BRIDE OVERTAKEN BY A SUDDEN IMPULSE OF FEAR.

IX.

DESCRIPTION OF THE BRIDE'S PERSON BY THE ATTENDANT VIRGINS.

X.

THE BRIDE'S INVITATION TO THE BRIDEGROOM.

XI.

LOVE UNQUENCHABLE.

XII.

THE CONCLUSION.

FIRST CANTICLE.

THE BRIDE IN THE KING'S CHAMBERS.

PLAN OF THE CANTICLE.

THIS Canticle may very properly be considered as introductory to the series. It supposes the Bride to have been already brought into the house of the Bridegroom, who is no less than a royal personage, the King himself; whilst the Bride is represented as one of an inferior condition in life, or at least as one, who by the ill-treatment of her relatives had been employed in servile labours.

Bishop Percy's description of the plan of this canticle is as follows: "The Bride had on the preceding evening been brought home to Solomon's palace and lodged in his hadarim, or inner apartments. In the morning she finds herself alone with the Bridemaids, the Bridegroom having withdrawn to his rural amusements. And here the poem commences.

"The Bride full of his charming idea, breaks out into the most rapturous expressions of love and tenderness, and addresses herself to the object of her affection as if he were present, wishing for his caresses (v. 1.), declaring her regard (v. 2.), and bearing testimony to the amiableness of his character, which, by a common Eastern metaphor, she compares to the diffusive fragrance of fine ointments or perfumes (v. 3). She then expresses her satisfaction on being brought into his family (v. 4.), and receives the congratulations of the Bridemaids, who compliment her on her affection and beauty. This produces some modest abatements on her part (v. 5.), and a short sketch of the early part of her history (v. 6.)

But immediately renewing her enquiries after her Beloved by that fine apostrophe, ‘Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon,’ &c. ; she receives some general directions from her virgin attendants, in consequence of which she sets out in search of him.”

FIRST CANTICLE.

Ch. I., v. 2–8.

Authorised version and arrangement.

2. (a) Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth ; (b) for thy love is better than wine. 3. (c) Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee. 4. Draw me, we will run after thee : (d) the king hath brought me into his chambers : we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine : the upright love thee. 5. (e) I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, (f) as the tents of Kedar, (g) as the curtains of Solomon. 6. Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me : (h) my mother’s children were angry with me ; they made me the keeper of their vineyards ; but mine own vineyard have I not kept. 7. (i) Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, (k) where thou feedest, (l) where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon : (m) for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions ? 8. If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, (n) go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds’ tents.

*Revised Version arranged in the form of Dialogue, chiefly after
Bp. Percy and Dr. Mason Good.*

BRIDE.

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth ! For O ! thy love is more delicious than wine.

Like the fragrance of thine own sweet perfumes is thy name—a liquid perfume poured forth—for this do the virgins love thee.

O draw me unto thee !

VIRGINS.

We will run after thee—we will follow the fragrance of thy perfumes.

BRIDE.

The King hath brought me into his apartments, his inner chambers.
VIRGINS.

We will exult and rejoice in thee ; we will celebrate thy love above wine ; thou art every way lovely.

BRIDE.

I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem ; as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains (or hangings) of Solomon.

Yet look not down upon me (despise me not) because I am black ; for the sun hath discoloured me. My mother's children were severe with me ; they made me keeper of their vineyards ; mine own vineyard have I not kept.

Tell me, O thou ! whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest thy flock, where thou restest it at noon : for why should I be as a wanderer among the flocks of thy companions ?

VIRGINS.

If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth, follow the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the tents of the shepherds.

PARAPHRASE.

BRIDE.

Oh ! let him kiss me with his mouth's own kisses !
For better thy love, oh ! better far than wine—
Sweeter thy name than sweetest fragrance
From perfum'd ointments poured forth—for this
The virgins all do love thee—draw, O draw me,
E'en to thyself.

VIRGINS.

Whitherso'er thou goest,
We will run after thee ; thy winning sweetness
Attracts our hearts and feet.

BRIDE.

What honour this !

What happiness ! for lo ! into his palace
The King hath brought me ! yea, hath open'd to me
Its inmost chambers !

VIRGINS.

Honour'd, happy Bride !

In this thy joy we will rejoice with thee—
We'll celebrate thy charms 'bove choicest wine—
All-worthy thou the love the upright bear thee !

BRIDE.

Daughters of Salem ! I am black, but comely—
Black, as are Kedar's tents along the desert—
Comely, as Solomon's pavilion
Curtain'd with silken hangings richly broider'd—
Look not upon me with disdain because,
From long exposure to the sun's fierce glare,
My cheek hath caught so burnt and black a hue—
For me my mother's children (fill'd with spite
And envious malice) did cast out, and make
To serve with unrequited drudgery
A keeper of their vineyards ; whilst mine own
Neglected lay, uncar'd for, and unkept—
O tell me where, thou lov'd one of my soul !
Thou feed'st thy flock to-day ; and where at noon,
In shady cool retreat, thou restest them—
For why should I, thee seeking still in vain,
Be forc'd most loath some other flock to join,
By other shepherds fed to me unknown—
A stranger among strangers—sad, forlorn—
My heart the while away in search of thee.

VIRGINS.

O fairest thou of women ! should thine eyes
Seek for him still in vain ; then closely mark
The footsteps of the flock, and with thy kids
As closely follow—mark well too the tents
His shepherds pitch ; for these will point the place,
The shady cool retreat, where rest his flock—
And there may'st thou too rest the noon-tide hour !

FIRST CANTICLE.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

(a) *Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.* We have here, as Bp. Percy remarks, an instance of that redundancy, in which the Hebrew idiom delights. So in Ps. 17, v. 10, “With their mouth they speak”—and in Ps. 66, v. 17, “I cried with my mouth.” So too in ch. 8 of this Song, the passage rendered, “would be utterly contemned,” is in the original Hebrew, “contenining they would contemn.” The same kind of Hebraic redundancy occurs also in this place, “let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.”

The use however of the term “kisses” is something more than a mere redundancy. It expresses on the part of the Bride her earnest desire, not only to have the Bridegroom’s love, but to have *much* of it—to enjoy the fullest manifestations, and the most abundant tokens, of his love. It was in this sense that our Saviour said of the woman, mentioned by St. Luke, chap. 7, v. 38, &c., that she “loved much,” because of her many “kisses;” for “since the time I came in she hath not ceased to kiss my feet.”

“And therefore,” says Bp. Patrick, “the beginning of this verse, ‘Let him kiss me with the *kisses* of his mouth,’ may be thus paraphrased, ‘Let him declare his love unto me in the most familiar and ample manner.’”

(b) *Better than wine.* Wine was considered among the Hebrews the chief of luxuries; the most costly entertainment for guests invited to a feast. Hence the term “wine” is used by them to express the greatest pleasures, the highest gratifications. If anything therefore could be spoken of as “*better* than wine,” it must be something super-excellent, something far surpassing even earthly good.

"Such to me," says the Bride, "is the love of my Beloved ; it is superior to all earthly comforts and pleasures ; it is 'better than wine.'"

(c) *Thy name is as ointments poured forth.* Perfumed ointments, so much used among the Jews, were thought to conduce to health as well as to pleasure. They were especially used at marriage entertainments, and on other festival occasions.

The King's name is compared to the "sweet savour" of these ointments ; as Solomon says elsewhere, "a good name is better than precious ointments." The comparison implies that as perfumed ointments poured out diffuse their fragrancy around, so the report of the King's virtues and greatness attracted the admiration and love of all who heard it— "therefore do the virgins love thee."

Bp. Patrick observes, "The attractive power of sweet ointments (to which Solomon here alludes) is notably declared in that which Basil (Epist. ad Julittam) relates of the manner of catching doves. This was by bringing up one tame ; and then, anointing her wings with ointment, they let her fly away ; and the sweet odour of the ointments drew abundance of pigeons to the cote of her owner."

(d) *The King hath brought me into his chambers.* The Hebrew word here used for "chambers" signifies properly a veil ; and especially the veil, or curtain, which separated the inner part of the tent from the midst. Hence it is applied to the interior of a building, by whatever means separated from the rest. It refers in this place to the inner apartments of the Palace, which were quite cut off from public view and access, and were especially appropriated to the women. The eastern nations always had, and still have, such retirements, where the women live separate and secluded.

These are the King's "chambers," or inner apartments of the Palace, called by the Hebrews *Hadarim*, and by the Turks of the present day *Harem*.

(e) *I am black, but comely.* If, as is generally thought, the Canticles were composed as an epithalamium, or nuptial song, on the occasion of Solomon's marriage with the daughter of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, (and this is the only marriage of Solomon which is particularly noticed in Scripture), then it would be very natural for the Egyptian Bride to say, comparing herself with the fair daughters of Jerusalem, "I am black;" though she might be able with equal truth to add, "but comely." For though she might be "black" in the complexion of her skin, yet she might, at the same time, be "comely," both in the features of her face, and in the proportions of her figure.

(f) *As the tents of Kedar.* It appears from Gen. 24, v. 13, that "Kedar" was the name of one of the sons of Ishmael, from whom the Arabians are descended.

Travellers inform us that to this day the tents of the Bedouins, or Arabs of the desert, called in Scripture "Kedarenos," are of a very dark or black colour, being made of the shaggy hair of their black goats. It is to these that the Bride compares the complexion of her sun-burnt skin.

(g) *As the curtains of Solomon.* The word rendered "curtains" in our Bible version, it has been well remarked, always denotes something belonging to a tent, or the different hangings of which it is composed. Thus Hab. 3, v. 7, "I saw the *tents* of Cushan in affliction; the *curtains* of the land of Midian did tremble."

The eastern monarchs, and great men, spare no expense in making their pavilions superb and beautiful. They often have them covered with purple, and lined with silk or satin broidered with gold, and adorned with precious stones.

We may well imagine therefore the beauty and elegance, which would be displayed in the state-pavilion of the magnificent Solomon; and which would form the most complete contrast to the dark and shaggy tents of the wild Arabs.

(h) *My mother's children were angry with me.* To account

for her very dark complexion, the Bride mentions her long exposure to the scorching sun. She complains of the cruel treatment, which she had received from her mother's children, her half-brothers (it is supposed), being the children of her mother, but by another father. Through their oppressive conduct she had been made to slave as the keeper of their vineyards, having been deprived of her own vineyard.

It is as if she had said to those around her, “ You see me discoloured by the sun, and bearing marks about me of long exposure to his fierce beams. But this arises from the cruel and oppressive manner, in which I have been treated by my relatives. For they have despised me, and cast me out ; and have made me to toil, as a slave, in the labours of the field ; not for my own benefit, but for theirs ; for they alone have received the profits of my toil, have reaped the fruits of my labours.”

It has been ingeniously conjectured by a commentator on this Song that perhaps, by one of those family intrigues so common at eastern courts, this Princess had been banished to some southern part of Egypt ; where being employed in servile field-labour, and thus constantly exposed to the burning sun, she soon contracted the black complexion of the natives—but that afterwards, by a counter intrigue and revolution equally common in eastern countries, she might have been recalled from her banishment—when the beauty of her features still remaining, despite her discoloration, would be the more remarkable ; and reaching the ears of the King of Israel might lay the foundation of her future fortune.

This of course is mere conjecture ; but it has at least the merit of novelty and ingenuity ; and it is by no means inconsistent with the romance of ancient eastern life.

(i) *Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth!* The poetical beauty of this abrupt transition is very great. The Bride, suddenly remembering the absent object of her affections, breaks off her conversation with the attendant virgins, and

by a bold apostrophe addresses him as if present. A pastoral turn is given to the piece—and the Shepherd-Bridegroom is earnestly called upon to describe the spot where he feeds his flock, and where he will rest them at noon ; in order that the Shepherdess-Bride may be with him, instead of being obliged to join herself to strangers.

(k) *Where thou feedest.* The pasture-grounds in the land of Judea were for the most part large unenclosed tracts of country, extending over many miles ; and consequently the shepherds, instead of having any fixed habitation, dwelt in tents ; passing on from one piece of pasturage to another, as the necessities of the flock might require.

(l) *Where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon.* It was the custom also in those hot countries for shepherds to retire with their flocks to some shady and cool spot during the hottest part of the day. Allusion to this custom is here made ; as it is also by the pastoral classic poets, both Greek and Latin. Virgil and Theocritus frequently refer to it. Plato in his *Phædrus* speaks of sheep “nooning” themselves.

(m) *For why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions.* Other shepherds are supposed to be feeding their flocks in the same tract of country ; and the Shepherdess-Bride suggests that should she not know where to find her Bridegroom’s pasture-ground, or his “shady cool retreat” at noon, she might be compelled to join the company of some other shepherds unknown to her ; and thus she would be subjected to all the inconvenience and unpleasantness of being a “stranger among strangers,” instead of spending the noon-tide hour of rest and refreshment in the society of her beloved partner.

(n) *Go thy way forth, &c.* The virgins, in giving her the required directions, bid her mark and follow the track made by his flock ; and also to observe the tents pitched by his assistant-shepherds, as that would indicate the spot where her Beloved might be found.

FIRST CANTICLE.

PRACTICAL COMMENTS.

I.

THE BRIDEGROOM-KING.

HIS KISSES—HIS LOVE—HIS NAME—HIS CHAMBERS.

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth ; for thy love is better than wine. Because of the savour of thy good ointments (thy Name is as ointment poured forth), therefore do the virgins love thee. Draw me, we will run after thee. The King hath brought me into his chambers.—Chap. 1, v. 2, 3, 4.

HIS KISSES.

“Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth”—The Bride thus expresses her earnest desire for the presence of the Bridegroom, and for the full expression of his love to her. It is as if she had said, “Let him not keep at a distance from me, but draw near to me—let him not assure me of his love only by word, but let him give me the best pledge and token of it, ‘let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.’”

This too is what the spiritually-minded Christian earnestly desires and prays for ; that he may enjoy the Saviour’s presence, the full manifestation of his love, the sweet inward sense and assurance of it. And it is for the purpose of meeting and gratifying this desire of the soul that Christ himself hath “instituted and ordained holy mysteries, as pledges of his love ;” or as the “kisses of his mouth.” When we “rightly receive” “that holy Sacrament” of the Lord’s Supper, we not only draw near to Christ in it, but he draws near to us ; and he renews to us therein the pledges of his

love ; he kisses us (as it were) with the “kisses of his mouth.”

What a delightful view of Sacramental seasons is this ! And if our Sacraments were but always received in a spirit of realizing faith, as being special means appointed for meeting our Beloved, for receiving from him afresh the “pledges of his love,” or the “kisses of his mouth”—*then* how would they be to us constant sources of sweet communion with Christ, “times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord”—with what “fervent desire” should we come to them ! with what real pleasure should we partake of them ! with what renewed strength and energy should we return from them, to go on our way rejoicing, and experiencing in ourselves the truth of the promise, “they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength ; they shall mount up with wings like eagles ; they shall run, and not be weary ; they shall walk, and not faint.”

HIS LOVE.

“*Thy love is better than wine*”—The experience of the love of Christ in our hearts, when we can “taste that the Lord is gracious,” is infinitely better than the effect of wine on the animal spirits. “Give strong drink to him that is ready to perish, and wine to those that be bitter of soul.”—Prov. 31, v. 6. But infinitely better, we say, is the love of Christ to cheer and revive the fainting soul of the believer, when he “drinks thereof, and forgets his poverty, and remembers his misery no more.”

The commandment given to Christians is, “Be not drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit;” because the Spirit inebriates not, yet exhilarates the soul ; and especially by causing it to experience a sense of the love of Christ.

This was indeed the highest blessing and enjoyment, which St. Paul could desire and pray for in behalf of the Ephesian

Christians, that they might “know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.”

HIS NAME.

“As a sweet savour, an ointment poured forth, is thy name”—Though no name is here mentioned, yet one name will immediately suggest itself to the spiritual mind—that name which is “above every name”—the “name of Jesus.”

This is indeed as a “sweet savour, a good ointment poured forth ;” both in the heavenly temple above, and in the Church below ; both to God himself, and to the saints of God.

Jesus Christ, as the name imports, is Jesus the *anointed* one—the anointed of God, the anointed of the Holy Ghost. He could say, “The Spirit of the Lord hath anointed me.” And the Spirit was given, “not by measure” unto him, but in all the fulness of its sanctifying influence.

Jesus Christ therefore was a *perfect* Being—the perfection of purity and holiness—the perfection of all human virtues and divine graces—the perfection of the “image of God.” And so God could look upon him with infinite complacency and delight ; declaring more than once by a voice from heaven, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am *well pleased*.”

Thus was Jesus Christ, by reason of his *sinless perfection*, as a “sweet savour” to God, as a fragrant ointment poured forth.

But yet further, and still more, was he so on account of his *atoning sacrifice* ; when he offered up himself without spot to God, as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Then especially was Jesus Christ as a “sweet savour” to God, as a good ointment poured forth ; as it is expressly said by St. Paul, “Christ also hath loved us, and hath given

himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a *sweet-smelling savour.*"

We find that even in the Patriarchal times, and under the law of Moses, the sacrifice for sin was declared to be as a sweet savour unto God. "And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savour.—Gen. 8, v. 21. "And the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord."—Lev. 1, v. 9.

We know however that those sacrifices were only types and shadows of "good things to come," and not the very image or substance of the things. The box of precious ointment was *then* unbroken, and its sweet savour only escaped in very small measure—but *now*, since Jesus Christ has come, and has offered up himself on the altar of his cross as the true atoning sacrifice for sin—*now* the box of precious ointment has indeed been *broken*, and its sweet savour poured forth far and wide—not only in the Church below, but in the heavenly temple above—not only to the saints of God, but to God himself.

Tongue never spake, ear never heard,
Never from heart o'erflow'd
A dearer name, a sweeter word,
Than JESUS, Son of God.

HIS CHAMBERS.

"*Draw me unto thee*"—The renewed and sanctified soul desires to be drawn nearer and nearer to Christ in sweet communion and fellowship; and, feeling its own weakness and inability, prays to be drawn by Christ himself, through the operations of his Spirit working inwardly, and by the fuller manifestation of his love.

“Draw me, thou whose name is as ointment poured forth ; draw me, for I would come, but I am weak ; I would come to thee, but a thousand cords draw me from thee ; sin draws, the flesh draws, Satan draws, the world draws, the fair earth itself (with its things seen and temporal) draws me from things unseen and eternal. Lord, draw me with bands of love, draw me to thyself.”

“*The King hath brought me*”—The Bridegroom is a King—the same spoken of in the 2nd Psalm as the “Son, whom we are to kiss ; the Lord’s anointed ; the King, whom he hath set upon his holy hill of Sion”—the same also as spoken of in the 45th Psalm, “My heart is inditing a good matter—I speak of the things which I have made touching the King.”

The Jews acknowledged that the King in these Psalms, and throughout the Song of Solomon, was Messiah, the Christ. In the New Testament Jesus is spoken of as the “King of saints ;” and he asserts his own sovereignty, saying, “Ye call me Lord and Master, and ye say well, for so I am.”

It is a solemn question therefore for ourselves, “Is Christ the King, whom I acknowledge ; not with my lips only, but in my heart, and in my life ?” The language of the unbelieving and disobedient is—if not literally, yet practically,—“we will not have this man to reign over us.”

“*Into his chambers*”—The Bride is brought into the King’s chambers—not merely into the King’s palace, but into its most private and sacred apartments, the place reserved for the King’s chief favourites.

This was indeed great honour for the Bride ; yet “such honour,” we may say, “have all his saints.” All true Christians are admitted to the nearest access, and closest communion with God through Christ. They have “boldness,” or liberty, “to enter into the “holiest of all,” “within the veil,” whither the “forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus.”

II.

THE BRIDE'S DESCRIPTION OF HERSELF.

BLACK, BUT COMELY.

I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem ; as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me (despise me not), because I am black, because the sun hath discoloured me. My mother's children were angry with me ; they made me the keeper of their vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept.—Ch. 1, v. 5, 6.

HER BLACKNESS.

“I am black, as the tents of Kedar”—In the midst of her high preferments and privileges, the Bride is distinguished for humility. She is ready to acknowledge her own unworthiness of the honour and happiness thus bestowed upon her. She owns to the blackness of her complexion. She confesses to her own want of wealth, or any other worldly advantage to recommend her to the King. “I am black,” she says, “as the tents of Kedar.” And then, in order to account for her dark complexion, she refers to her previous history, representing herself as having, through the cruel and oppressive conduct of her relatives, been compelled to a life of drudgery in the labours of the field ; being made a keeper of their vineyards, whilst of her own vineyard they had deprived her.

Such was the contrast between her former situation, and that to which she was now exalted. A poor oppressed slave is taken from her field-work, and is introduced as the chosen partner of the King among the inmates of a palace. “The Lord raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill ; to set them among princes, to make them inhabit the throne of glory.”

The spiritual application of this is obvious. A Saviour's love has been set, not upon the righteous, but upon *sinners*

—not upon the worthy, but upon the unworthy—not upon those, who had any moral beauty to recommend them, but who were morally deformed and defaced; black (as it were) through sin; the servants of iniquity; the slaves of Satan, led captive of him at his will, despoiled and ruined by him.

Such is man's state by nature. Such was the former condition of those, who are now espoused to Christ through faith; being now the objects of his love, even as he is of theirs.

Christians are sensible of this, and are ever ready to confess it. They know that in themselves there “dwelleth no good thing;” and in the midst of all the high privileges, to which they are admitted, they still retain an humbling remembrance of their original unworthiness.

We have a striking example of this in the “holy Apostle St. Paul.” No Christian was ever so highly privileged and honoured as he was, and yet none so free from pride and self-conceit—none so ready to humble himself, and to magnify the riches of divine grace as manifested toward him.

Thus, in one place, we find him speaking of himself as less than the least of all saints”—in another place, as the “chief of sinners.” He acknowledges that before his conversion he was a “blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious;” and instead of taking credit to himself for what he became after his conversion, he gives all the praise and glory to God, saying, “by the grace of God I am what I am.”

This last expression may lead us to notice respecting the Bride,

HER COMELINESS.

She who could say of herself, “I am black, even as the tents of Kedar,” could add, “but comely, even as the pavilion of Solomon.”

So, in like manner, can Christians speak of themselves with truth, as being both black and comely. Black we are by nature; comely by the grace of God—black in ourselves; comely in Christ—black as regards our own righteousness; comely in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us—black through sin, both original and actual; comely as being washed from our sins through the blood of Christ, and sanctified by his Spirit.

This important truth should ever be borne in mind, that all the evil in us is of ourselves, and that all the good in us is of God. If we are “black,” the blackness is our own, both by nature, and by practice; if we are “comely,” our comeliness is of the Lord, the gift of God’s grace, the effect of the Holy Spirit sanctifying us.

We meet with a very striking illustration of this in the Prophet Ezekiel, chap. 16, where God speaks of the original state of Israel as that of an outcast, ready to perish; as He passed by, and saw her, He had compassion upon her, and bade her live; and clothed her, and even beautified her with the richest ornaments, such as would befit a Bride. “And when I passed by thee, and saw thee in thine own blood, I said unto thee, Live. Then washed I thee with water; and I anointed thee with oil. I clothed thee also with broidered work, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk. I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck. And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head. Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver; and thy raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and broidered work; thou didst eat fine flour, and honey, and oil: thou wast exceeding beautiful. And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy

beauty : for it was perfect through *my comeliness*, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God."

There could not be a better comment upon the words, "I am black" by my own nature and practice ; "but comely" through the grace of God, through the merits of my Saviour, and through the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit.

III.

THE BRIDEGROOM-SHEPHERD.

THE SHEPHERDESS—THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE FLOCK— THE SHEPHERDS' TENTS.

Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon ; for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions ? If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents.—Chap. 1, v. 7, 8.

SHEPHERDESS.

The Bride here suddenly assumes the character of a Shepherdess, and speaks of her Beloved as a Shepherd, whose presence and society during the day she greatly desires. She therefore enquires where he will feed his flock, and rest them at noon.

The application of this to Christ and his Church is at once obvious.

Christ is the Shepherd—the "Good Shepherd," the "great Shepherd," the "chief Shepherd." "I am the good Shepherd, the good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep"—"Our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the Sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant"—"When the chief

Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory,
which fadeth not away."

The Church of Christ is the Shepherdess—As she is the Bride to the heavenly Bridegroom, so is she the Shepherdess to the heavenly Shepherd.

The strength of her affection toward him is shewn by the manner of her address to him, "O thou whom my soul loveth." It is so likewise with all true Christians—they "love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." They love him, not in word only, but in deed and in truth; not in the mere profession of the lips, but in the feelings of the heart and soul. They love him, not only for what he is in himself, the "perfection of beauty;" but also for what he is to them, a Redeemer and Saviour; who "loved them, and gave himself for them, an offering and a sacrifice to God." Thus every true Christian believer can address Christ in the same fervent manner as the Shepherdess here addresses her Shepherd, "O thou whom my soul loveth."

She is represented as anxiously enquiring where he will feed his flock, and rest them at noon.

In reply she receives a twofold direction what to do, in case she should lose sight of him, viz., 1, to follow the footsteps of the flock; 2, to mark where his under-shepherds have pitched their tents—"go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents."

The spiritual application of this is not difficult. The souls that are seeking Christ, and earnestly desiring his presence, and to have communion with him, must observe this twofold direction.

THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE FLOCK.

These are to be carefully marked, and closely followed. But where, it may be asked, are the footsteps of the flock to

be seen, in order that they may be followed? They are traced for us in the word of God, in those "holy scriptures which have been written for our learning; and in which are recorded (expressly as "ensamples" to us) the lives of Patriarchs and Prophets under the Old Testament, and of Evangelists and Apostles under the New. For the "flock of God" have at all times, and in all places, gone the same way; which way has been the way of faith, and the "way of holiness"—"for without faith it is impossible to please God;" and "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

"Be ye followers of them," says St. Paul, "who through faith and patience inherit the promises." And in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews the Apostle gives us a long list of those Patriarchs and Prophets of old, who all lived and died in faith; and whose faith we are to follow, if we would tread in the footsteps of the flock. "Ask for the old paths, that ye may walk therein, and may find rest to your souls." These Old Testament paths are indeed the same in spirit and substance as the New Testament paths. The Patriarchs and Prophets walked by the same faith as the Evangelists and Apostles.

Thus in the second part of the Homily on Faith, with reference to this eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, it is said, "This is the Christian faith, which these holy men had, and which we ought to have. And although they are not named Christian men, yet theirs was a Christian faith; for they looked for all the benefits of God the Father, through the merits of his Son Jesus Christ, as we do now. This difference is between them and us, that they looked when Christ should come, and we be in the time when he is come; therefore saith St. Augustine, 'the time is altered and changed, but not the faith.' "

If then we would follow the footsteps of the flock, we must "search the scriptures" for them. The word of God is to be our guide and rule—that word with its precepts and promises, and varied examples of saintly men, who have walked by faith and not by sight; who, confessing themselves to be "strangers and pilgrims on the earth," have desired a "better country, that is a heavenly."

THE SHEPHERDS' TENTS.

The second direction given was to mark where the shepherds, the under-shepherds, pitched their tents. This would serve as a kind of landmark to shew where the chief Shepherd might be found. And the application to be made of this is clearly to the "Ministers of Christ," the Bishops and Pastors of his flock, who act as under-shepherds to him.

Thus whilst the Sacred Scriptures have been provided to trace out for us the "footsteps of the flock," and to make plain to us the way in which we are to go; the sacred ministry also has been appointed for a similar purpose.

It was for this that Christ ordained his twelve Apostles, and gave them power to ordain others also; that there might never be wanting a due succession of faithful men to serve in the sacred ministry of his Church.

Their office is to "feed the flock of God, which is among them, taking the oversight thereof"—to feed them with wholesome and sound doctrine, gathered out of the Scriptures—to guide and govern them with wise counsels and godly discipline—and especially to be themselves "examples to the flock" by their own holy Christian living.

This is beautifully expressed in the service of our Church at the consecration of a Bishop, which will likewise apply in measure to the ordination of every minister—"Be thou to the flock of Christ a Shepherd, not a wolf; feed them, devour

them not. Hold up the weak, heal the sick, bind up the broken, bring again the outcasts, seek the lost. Be so merciful that you be not too remiss ; so minister discipline that you forget not mercy ; that when the Chief Shepherd shall appear you may receive the never-fading crown of glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

But if this be the duty of Christian Pastors on the one hand—thus diligently to watch over, and take care of, the sheep of Christ—it must equally be the duty of Christian people, on the other hand, diligently to attend to the ministrations of those, who are "set over them in the Lord." "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you ; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake."—1 Thess., 5, v. 12. And again, "Remember them that have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of the Lord, and who watch for your souls, as they that must give account."—Heb. 13, v. 7, 17.

There is therefore, we conclude, this twofold direction given for the guidance of Christians—1, the *Sacred Scriptures*, wherein are traced the "footsteps of the flock ;" and 2, the *sacred ministry*, represented by the "shepherds' tents." They who, like the Bride, the Shepherdess, seek after the "good Shepherd," and earnestly desire to enjoy his presence, and to have communion with him, should be careful to observe this twofold rule :—They should "search the Scriptures daily," to find the "footsteps of the flock," and to follow them : and they should also give good heed to the counsels and instructions of those Christian ministers, who may be set over them ; and who have been ordained for this very purpose to be guides and pastors of the flock.

We cannot perhaps better close these comments than by

reciting two very suitable Collects of our Church, which bear upon the subject ; and which contain the twofold direction—the one referring to the “ footsteps of the flock,” and the other referring to the “ shepherds’ tents.”

COLLECT FOR ALL SAINTS’ DAY.

O Almighty God, who hast knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord ; Grant us grace so to follow thy blessed Saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys, which thou hast prepared for them that unfeignedly love thee ; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

COLLECT FOR ST. PETER’S DAY.

O Almighty God, who by thy Son Jesus Christ didst give to thy Apostle Saint Peter many excellent gifts, and commandedst him earnestly to feed thy flock ; Make, we beseech thee, all Bishops and Pastors diligently to preach thy holy Word, and the people obediently to follow the same, that they may receive the crown of everlasting glory ; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

SECOND CANTICLE.

THE BRIDEGROOM AND THE BRIDE TOGETHER IN THEIR GARDEN RETREAT.

PLAN OF THE CANTICLE.

The scene of this canticle is laid in the palace gardens, to a beautiful arbour in which the royal pair have retired.

The warmest encomiums and terms of praise pass between them, each vying with the other in expressions of admiration, esteem, and love.

The Bridegroom begins by comparing the effect, produced by the lovely Bride's appearance in public, to that produced by the appearance of Pharaoh's chariots, with their far-famed horses, as he had often witnessed it on grand state occasions.

The Bride in reply expresses her devoted attachment to the Bridegroom, and declares that in her estimation he is as the sweetest and loveliest objects in nature, the most exquisitely scented flowers from the finest gardens in Judea. She likewise notices the beautiful arbour, or bower, into which the King had brought her; and confesses her own unworthiness of such distinction, speaking of herself as a mere wild rose of the field, an insignificant lily of the valleys.

The Bridegroom, taking up the idea, declares that she is indeed a lily; but that, as a lily among thorns is rendered so

much the more beautiful by contrast, so is she too as contrasted with the daughters of the land.

The Bride in turn commends his manly grace, and compares him to the apple or citron tree, which for fruit and foliage surpasses all other trees of the wood.

The rest of the canticle proceeds in a highly poetical and passionate strain, "with that digressive unconnected wildness of transition," as Bp. Percy describes it, "which all pastoral poetry delights in."

S E C O N D C A N T I C L E .

Ch. 1., v. 9—17; ch. 2, 1—7.

Authorised version and arrangement.

Ch. 1, v. 9. (a) I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots. 10. Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold. 11. (b) We will make thee borders of gold with studs of silver. 12. While the King sitteth at his table, my (c) spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof. 13. A bundle of (d) myrrh is my well-beloved unto me; he shall lie all night betwixt my breasts. 14. My beloved is unto me as a cluster of (e) camphire in (f) the vineyards of Engedi. 15. Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast (g) doves' eyes. 16. Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant: also our (h) bed is green. 17. The beams of our house are cedar, and our rafters of fir.
Ch. 2, v. 1. I am the (i) rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. 2. As the lily of the valley among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. 3. As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. 4. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. 5. Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love. 6. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me. 7. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.

*Revised Version arranged in the form of Dialogue, chiefly after
Bp. Percy and Dr. Mason Good.*

BRIDEGROOM.

I have compared thee, O my love, my partner, to a company of horses in the chariots of Pharaoh.

Comely are thy cheeks (brows) with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold.

Yet borderings of gold will we make for thee with studs of silver.

BRIDE.

While the King sitteth at his table, in the circle of his friends, my spikenard shall diffuse its fragrance.

As a casket of myrrh is my well-beloved unto me ; he shall lie all night in my bosom.

As a cluster of cypress-flowers is my beloved unto me in the vine-yards of Engedi.

BRIDEGROOM.

Behold, thou art fair, my love, my partner ; behold, thou art fair : thine eyes are the eyes of doves.

BRIDE.

Behold, thou art beautiful, my beloved ; yea, thou art pleasant. And how green is our flowery bed !

The beams of our house are cedars, our roof is of cypresses.

But I am a mere wild rose of the field of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.

BRIDEGROOM.

As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

BRIDE.

As the citron-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons.

I had a longing desire, and I sat down under his shade, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

He brought me into the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.

Support me with cordials, sustain me with citrons ; for I am fainting with love.

His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraceth me.

I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up nor awake my beloved until he please.

SONG OF SOLOMON.

PARAPHRASE.

BRIDEGROOM.

O sharer of my heart ! my own best lov'd !
As on some day of regal state I've seen,
In grand procession, Pharaoh's chariots
All other sights eclipsing—with display
Of noblest horses, prancing in their pride,
Richly caparison'd, their trappings decked
With gold, and silver studs, and precious stones—
So have I likewise seen thy peerless self
Eclipse all others in our bridal train—
The centre of all eyes, of all admired—
Thy native beauty to more vantage shewn
By chains of gold, and rows of costly jewels—
Yet must we ornaments more costly still
Provide for thee, and such as more befit
The Consort of a King—

BRIDE.

My spikenard-casque

Its fragrant treasures shall diffuse around
In the King's presence ; whilst with him I sit,
A partner at his table—O my love !
A casket of sweet myrrh art thou to me,
Which all the night shall in my bosom lie—
My well-beloved ! yea like the cypress-flowers,
Whose exquisite scent doth fill Engedi's vineyards ;
E'en such art thou to me—

BRIDEGROOM.

My own best-lov'd !

Lo, thou art fair ; thine eyes are as dove's eyes,
Emblems of gentleness and constancy,
Of true and fond affection—

BRIDE.

Beautiful,

Lo, beautiful art thou, my love ! yea, pleasant,
 Full of all grace and sweet attractiveness—
And this our garden bower ! how cool and shady !
 It looks more nature's handiwork than art's—
 Green is our flowery couch—our roof above
 The spreading cedars ; and on either side
 A leafy wall, of fir and cypress form'd—
 But what am I amid this cultur'd scene,
 This garden of delights ? a mere wild rose,
 In Sharon's fields once growing, and which there
 Had wither'd soon and died except for thee—
 A lonely lily of the vale, which none
 Would ere have stoop'd to notice and admire.

BRIDEGROOM.

E'en as a lily, in the midst of thorns
 And briers found—so is my love among
 The daughters of the land.

BRIDE.

As of all trees

None can the citron match, pride of the woods,
 For fruit and foliage—so among the sons,
 For noble manly mien in face and form,
 None with my own beloved can compare—
 Beneath that citron's grateful shade I've sat,
 And tasted with delight its luscious fruit—
 Unto the banqueting house he brought me,
 Love was his banner o'er me—oh ! I'm faint
 With love excessive—stay my swooning spirit
 With cordials, and with citrons—oh ! the bliss !
 Thus to be folded in his fond embrace—
 I charge you, Sion's daughters ! softly tread,

As would the hunter of the shy gazelles,
 Lest my beloved be untimely stirr'd,
 And the sweet chain with which I'm bound be broken.

SECOND CANTICLE.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

(a) *I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots.* Most of the annotators have explained this as referring to some particular steed in Pharaoh's chariots, distinguished for its beauty and docility; to which therefore the Bridegroom by way of compliment and encomium compared his Bride.

Such a comparison certainly does not seem to the mere English reader a very refined one, but great allowance must of course be made for difference of national tastes and manners. The horse is held in very high estimation among the people of the East. The Arabs for instance, as is well known, are extravagantly fond of their horses, and caress them as if they were their children. We find too even Theocritus, the great pastoral poet of the Greeks, adopting the same figure, and complimenting the far-famed Helen by comparing her to a beautiful steed:

As on the lawn a cypress; or a steed
 In graceful trappings, of Thessalian breed—
 So, chief of beauties, Lacedæmon's pride,
 The rosy-finger'd Helen all outvied."

Idyl I.H., 39.

Nevertheless it may be forcibly objected to this view, as is done by the more modern commentators, that the allusion in

the canticle is not to any one particular horse, but to a number or "company" of horses; for such is the real meaning of the Hebrew word here employed; as Parkurst and Simon both of them express it "*collective equitum.*" So in English we often use the term "horse" *collectively*, as denoting a number or "company" of horses.

The comparison is really between the *effect* produced by the appearance of the Bride in the marriage procession, and that produced by the procession of Pharaoh's chariots on grand state occasions.

Mr. Fry remarks that probably "these celebrated horses of the Egyptian breed, richly caparisoned, and set off with all the display of golden ornament and precious stones, were accustomed to come forth on days of state, and perhaps had appeared a conspicuous object in some late procession."

Dr. Good speaks of the comparison as "extending to the sumptuous trappings of the beautiful steed, and the graceful and brilliant ornaments of the Bride. And that this was an idea very prominent in the poet's mind, may be easily collected from the eulogy, with which the King immediately bursts forth on the magnificence of the bridal attire, 'thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold.'"

"The orientals, so highly valuing their horses, spare no expense to ornament them with the most costly trappings of gold, enriched with pearls and precious stones: and it is very observable that the Arabian and Turkish ladies decorate themselves in a similar manner, wearing rows of pearls and precious stones round their head-dress, and descending over their cheeks; gold chains also and pearls upon their necks and bosoms. This agrees exactly with the ornaments here mentioned."—*Williams.*

(b) *We will make thee borders of gold, with studs of silver.* At the same time that the King admires and commends, not only the natural beauty, but also the artificial adornments of

the Bride, yet he promises to make a still better provision for her in this respect—"borders of gold with studs of silver."

(c) *My spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof.* The spikenard was the most highly valued of all the perfumed ointments so much in use among the Jews, both on account of its exquisite fragrance, and of its scarceness and consequent dearness. This spikenard was usually put into a small box or casket, which might be carried in the hand, or worn about the person. Thus, when Mary came to anoint Jesus, it is said that she brought with her an "alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious."

(d) *A bundle of myrrh, &c.* Besides sprinkling and burning perfumes, the people of the east frequently use bunches of odoriferous, sweet-smelling plants, as well as flowers; and also wear about them little bags or bottles of perfume. The "bundle of myrrh" Castalio would render a "wreath or nosegay of flowery myrrh." "But a better conjecture," observes Dr. Good, "is that of Parkurst, who says, "It seems to be what Dioscorides, lib. 1, 74, calls *stacte*, which exudes from the tree of its own accord, and makes a perfume of itself. It is very fragrant and dear, and is said to be at present unknown. The eastern ladies were accustomed to enclose this, as well as other perfumes, in a small casket of gold or ivory, which they wear in their bosoms, and which is said to have the effect, not only of diffusing a pleasant fragrance around, but also of exhilarating the spirits. The Persians employ a little casket for the same purpose, which they call *naseh*.

(e) *A cluster of camphire, &c.* For "camphire" the marginal reading is "cypress," which is a better translation. "For our *camphire*," Bp. Patrick remarks, "was unknown to the ancients, and doth not grow in clusters, but is the resinous substance of a tree in Borneo and in China: and therefore it is far better translated in the margin of our bibles, *cypress*. But by *cypress* is not to be understood the

tree, which bears that name among us; but an aromatic plant in the east, which was a kind of *ligustrum*, called by Pliny *cyperus*, and sometimes *cyprus*; which produced a most sweet bush of *flowers*, and also *berries*, not much different from the fragrancy of spikenard. Whence it is likely that the famous island Cyprus took its name; because here (as at Ascalon in Judea, and on the banks of the Nile) the best or most odoriferous *cyprus* grows. Thus both Stephanus and Eustathius; The island Cyprus hath its name "from the flower of cypress growing there;" as Bochart shews in his Canaan, lib. I, c. 3. Of which flowers, or of the seed, was made that ointment which Pliny calls the *unguent royal*."

It is from these cypress flowers that the oriental *henna* is obtained, a beautiful golden dye, with which the natives tinge their hair and the tips of their fingers. Dr. Kitto has these remarks, "The camphire is now generally admitted to be the Henna of the Arabians. The deep colour of its bark, the light green of its foliage, and the softened mixture of white-yellow in its blossoms, present a combination, as agreeable to the eye, as the odour is to the smell. The flowers grow in dense clusters, the grateful fragrance of which is as much appreciated now as in the time of Solomon. The women take great pleasure in these clusters, hold them in their hand, carry them in their bosom, and keep them in their apartments to perfume the air."

Sir W. Jones describes the Henna, which he saw, as a very elegant shrub about six feet high before it was in flower. On bruising some of the leaves, moistened with water, and applying it to the nails and tips of the fingers, they were in a short time changed to an orange scarlet.

(f) *In the vineyards of Engedi.* This place was a few miles to the east of Bethlhem; and not far from Jericho, and the mouth of the river Jordan. It was in some cave of the wilderness of Engedi that David had an opportunity of killing Saul when in pursuit of him.—1 Sam., 24, v. 1, 2, 3.

One of the recent travellers in those parts, the Rev. H. B. Tristram, speaking of Engedi, says, “The hill-sides bore most unexpected testimony to the accuracy of the allusions made to its *vineyards* in the Song of Solomon (ch. 1, v. 4). We found all the lower slopes of the mountain, to the height of more than five hundred feet, carefully terraced ; and above each terrace the remains of neat lime-cemented channels, leading from deep rain cisterns, which were hewn out of the rock at each step of the terraces, and carefully roofed and plastered. A few straggling remnants of the *camphire* (Cant. 1, 14) linger in some of the recesses—the *henna* of Arab ladies, the *Lawsonia alba* of the botanists.”

(g) *Thou hast doves' eyes.* Bp. Percy remarks, “To conceive the force of this expression we must not refer it to our common pigeons, but to the large and beautiful eyes of the doves of Syria. They who have seen that fine eastern bird the carrier-pigeon will need no commentary on this place.” Bp. Patrick says, “The *eyes* show more than any part else the inward affections of the mind ; and doves' eyes are the emblems of simplicity, candour, sincerity, and purity.”

(h) *Our bed is green, &c.* A beautiful arbour in the royal gardens is probably here referred to ; and nothing can better illustrate it than Milton's description of Adam's bower in Paradise :—

It was a place
 Chos'n by the Sovran Planter, when he fram'd
 All things to Man's delightful use—The roof
 Of thickest covert was, inwoven shade,
 Laurel and myrtle, and what higher grew
 Of firm and fragrant leaf—On either side
 Acanthus, and each odorous bushy shrub,
 Fenc'd up the verdant wall—Each beauteous flow'r,
 Iris all hues, roses, and jessamine,
 Reared high their flourish'd heads between, and wrought
 Mosaic ; under foot the violet,
 Crocus, and hyacinth, with rich inlay
 Border'd the ground, more colour'd than with stone
 Of costliest emblem.

(i) *I am the rose of Sharon, &c.* These words have generally been understood as the words of the Bridegroom ; but it is now admitted by the best commentators that they are the words of the Bride ; spoken, not in self-exaltation, but in self-depreciation ; representing her as an ordinary rose, once growing in the fields of Sharon, but now transplanted into the royal gardens. Accordingly we find that in the Septuagint translation, followed by the Vulgate, it is rendered, “I am a flower of the plain.”

“A little attention to the context will convince us that the Bride does not here mean to extol the charms of her person, but rather the contrary. The Bridegroom had just before called her *fair* ; she, with a becoming modesty, represents her beauty as nothing extraordinary, as that of a mere common wild flower.”—*Percy*.

The plain of Sharon seems to have been peculiarly adapted for the growth of roses from its dry and light soil ; and it has been suggested that they were probably grown there for their use in perfumes, which form an important article of commerce in the East. The roses of Sharon would therefore be grown in large fields, or tracts of ground ; and would be in a wild state as compared with the roses of a highly cultured garden.

(j) *As the lily among thorns.* The beauty of the Bride is here set forth by way of contrast. Among the daughters of the land she is as far superior in point of loveliness, as a lily compared with the thorns among which it grew.

It has been observed by travellers in Palestine that it is not uncommon to meet with lilies thus growing among thorns. “Close by these lilies there grew several of the thorny shrubs of the desert ; but above them rose the lily spreading out its fresh green leaf as a contrast to the dingy verdure of these prickly shrubs.” (*Bonar.*) Dr. Thompson also remarks of the lily of Palestine, “It grows among thorns, and I have sadly lacerated my hands in extricating it

from them. Nothing can be in higher contrast than the luxuriant velvety softness of this lily, and the withered tangled hedge of thorns about it."

(k) *As the Apple-tree, &c.* The tree here referred to is generally considered to be the "citron;" and so it is rendered in the Chaldee Paraphrase. Like the orange-tree, and other trees of the same class, it has a dark glossy foliage, affording abundance of shade; whilst its bright golden fruit interspersed, and shining through, gives it an appearance of great beauty, and makes it a most conspicuous and attractive object.

The term "apple," Dr. Good remarks, is of almost universal application, in all languages, to every fruit of a large and globular form (such as the citron or orange) not involved in a nucleus or shell.

(l) *His banner over me was love.* This has been explained by some as referring to a custom among the Hebrews of displaying a banner on the festive tent, or the "banqueting house" as it is here called. On nuptial occasions the word "love" would be inscribed in this banner; and therefore in this sense the Bride might say, his banner over me was "love."

According, however, to another view the expression rather intimates that the Bridegroom conquered by the display of his love; as it is said in the language of Scripture, "we love him because he first loved us."

(m) *I charge you by the roes and by the hinds.* The animals here alluded to belonged probably to the antelope tribe; and were such as are commonly known by the name of gazelles. Their gracefulness of shape, their lightness of foot, and the great beauty of their eyes, are their chief characteristics. Extremely wild and shy, they will suddenly start at the slightest stir or noise, and bound away to their rocky retreats.

The Bride therefore directs her attendants to be as careful to avoid making any stir or noise, which might wake up her Beloved, as the hunters would be when in pursuit of these wild and beautiful creatures.

The wild gazelle on Judah's hills
Exulting yet may bound,
And drink from all the living rills
That gush on holy ground ;
Its airy step, and glorious eye,
May glance in tameless transport by :—

A step as fleet, an eye more bright,
Hath Judah witness'd there ;
And o'er her scenes of lost delight
Inhabitants more fair ;
The cedars wave on Lebanon,
But Judah's statelier maid's are gone.

Hebrew Melody.

SECOND CANTICLE.

PRACTICAL COMMENTS.

MUTUAL COMMENDATIONS BETWEEN THE BRIDEGROOM AND THE
BRIDE; REPRESENTING THE MUTUAL LOVE AND COMPLACENCY,
WHICH SUBSIST BETWEEN CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH.

I.

THE BRIDEGROOM'S COMMENDATION OF THE BRIDE.

PHARAOH'S CHARIOTS—ROWS OF JEWELS AND CHAINS OF GOLD
—BORDERS OF GOLD WITH STUDS OF SILVER.

I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots. Thy cheeks, or brows, are comely with jewels, thy neck with chains of gold. We will make thee borders of gold with chains of silver.—Chap. 1, v. 12, 13, 14.

PHARAOH'S CHARIOTS.

"I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots."—In the grand procession of Pharaoh's chariots, on some state occasion, with their company of horses—high-mettled, but well managed—proudly prancing, and richly caparisoned—the chief points to attract attention would be the beauty of the horses themselves; the beauty of their order and unity of action; and the beauty of their trappings and equipments; glittering as they would be with gold, and silver, and even precious stones.

It is to such a host or company of horses, admirable in their appearance, and marching in unbroken array, that the Church is compared; both as regards her goodly order and unity, and also as regards her adornments.

The *unity* of the Church was the great subject of our Saviour's prayer, as recorded in the 17th chapter of St. John : "that they all may be one ; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee ; that they may be one, even as we are one." Hence St. Paul, in his Epistles to the Christian Churches, so strongly warns them against divisions, and presses upon them so earnestly the cultivation of unity and order. "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you ; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."—1 Cor., 1, v. 10. "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."—Ephes. 4, v. 4. "Let all things be done decently and in order."—1 Cor., 14, v. 40. "For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ."—Coloss. 2, v. 5.

We in one covenant are join'd,
And one in Jesus are ;
With voices and with hearts combin'd
His praise we will declare :
In doctrine and in practice one,
We'll love and serve the Lord alone ;
With one accord sound forth his praise,
Till we shall see his face.

Moravian.

ROWS OF JEWELS AND CHAINS OF GOLD.

"*Thy cheeks are comely with jewels, thy neck with chains of gold.*"—These, spiritually understood and applied, represent the Christian graces, those true adornments of the Church and of the soul ; which may well be compared to "rows of jewels and chains of gold" for this reason—because there is a connection between them, and a mutual relationship, whereby one Christian grace is set off to greater advantage by another ; even as it is with well-assorted jewels, tastefully and judiciously strung together.

For it must be remembered that the true Christian character is not formed of only one or two graces, but of several. St. Paul, for instance, speaks of "faith, hope, charity ; these three." And again he says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."

It is only when these different Christian graces are combined, each in its proper place and proportion, that the true Christian character appears in its completeness. Hence the exhortation, " add to your faith virtue ; and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance ; and to temperance patience ; and to patience godliness ; and to godliness brotherly kindness ; and to brotherly kindness charity."—*2 Pet., 1, v. 5, 6, 7.*

These are the "rows of jewels, and chains of gold ;" the true adornments of the soul ; the "true riches." These constitute that "true and heavenly *wisdom*," of which it is declared, " Man knoweth not the price of wisdom ; it cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it ; and the exchange for it shall not be for jewels. No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls ; the price of wisdom is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold."—*Job 28, v. 19.*

We ask not golden streams of wealth

Along our path to flow ;

We ask not undecaying health,

Nor length of years below.

We ask not honours, which an hour

May bring and take away,

We ask not pleasure, pomp, or power,

Lest we should go astray.

We ask for *wisdom* :—Lord impart

The knowledge how to live ;

A wise and understanding heart

To all before thee give.

Montgomery.

BORDERS OF GOLD WITH STUDS OF SILVER.

"We will make thee borders of gold with studs of silver."— Thus although the Bride's adornments were always beautiful, yet in the Bridegroom's estimation they were not sufficient ; and therefore he promises that he will add to them.

The application of this to the case of Christian believers is that, as they have already received grace, so shall they receive yet more. "He giveth more grace"—"to him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundance."

Hence the exhortations to Christians to "grow in grace;" and to "increase and abound yet more and more." For the "path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth *more and more* unto the perfect day." It is in this spirit that St. Paul, speaking of himself, says, "not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect ; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."— Phil. 3, v. 12.

Be this our happy destiny,
Lord Jesus, to be one with thee ;
Grant, thro' thy Spirit's leading,
That we may gain yet firmer root,
May bear yet more abundant fruit,
From grace to grace proceeding :
From thee daily
Strength receiving—to thee cleaving,
Blessed Jesus—
Thus shall we shew forth thy praises.

Moravian.

II.

THE BRIDE'S COMMENDATION OF THE BRIDEGROOM.

THE SPIKENARD AT THE FEAST—THE MYRRH IN THE BOSOM,
AND THE CYPRESS-FLOWERS.

While the King sitteth at his table, my spikenard shall diffuse its fragrance. A bundle of myrrh is my Beloved unto me ; he shall lie all night in my bosom. My Beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire, or cypress, from the vineyards of Engedi.—Chap. 1, v. 12, 13, 14.

THE SPIKENARD AT THE FEAST.

“*While the King sitteth at his table.*”—In a peculiar sense it may be said that at the holy Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper the King sitteth at his table.

It is true that in all sacred ordinances Christ is present with his disciples ; not in body, but in spirit ; for he himself has declared “where two or three are met together in my name there am I in the midst of them.” But still in a peculiar sense he may be said to be present, and to sit with his disciples as at a feast, when they meet around his sacramental table, in obedience to his own command, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

When sacramental seasons are thus viewed, what holy and blessed seasons do they appear ; when the presence of the Master at the feast, of the King at his table, is realised ! How high a privilege to be admitted to such a feast, to be guests at such a table !

Yet this is only an introduction to, and a preparation for, still higher and better things to come—when the table will be spread, not in the Church below, but in the heavenly courts above—and when the King shall be present, not in

spirit only, and invisibly, but in his own person, and “face to face” with his honoured and happy guests. In the prospect of this how well may it be said, “Blessed are they, which are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”

“*My spikenard shall send forth the smell thereof.*”—This intimates (on the part of the Bride) an earnest desire to do what she can to render honour to the royal Bridegroom, and to manifest her grateful sense of his goodness towards her.

We find that whilst Jesus was upon earth the very same thing was done to him, and for the same purpose. When, for instance, he was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the Leper, and they made him a supper ; Mary took a pound of ointment of spikenard, very precious, and anointed the head and the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair—and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Here was a *literal* fulfilment of the language of the Bride, “while the King sitteth at his table my spikenard shall diffuse its fragrance.” .

So it is still in a *spiritual* sense, when the hearts of believers are filled with earnest desires to serve and please Christ ; to render honour unto him ; to manifest their love, esteem, and gratitude towards him. The prayers and praises of his people are as a “sweet savour” to Christ ; and so likewise are their Christian virtues and graces, when brought into active exercise. M. Henry observes on this point, “When good Christians in any religious duty—especially in the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, where the King is pleased to sit with us (as it were) at his own table—have their graces exercised, their hearts broken by repentance, healed by faith, and inflamed with holy love and desire toward Christ, then the *spikenard* sendeth forth the smell thereof.”

Say shall we yield him in costly devotion,
 Odours of Edom, and offerings divine,
 Gems of the mountain, and pearls of the ocean,
 Myrrh from the forest, and gold from the mine ?

 Vainly we offer each ample oblation,
 Vainly with gold would his favour secure ;
 Richer by far is the heart's adoration,
 Dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.

Heber.

THE MYRRH IN THE BOSOM AND THE CYPRESS-FLOWERS.

“A bundle of myrrh is my beloved unto me ; he shall lie all night in my bosom. My beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire, or cypress.”—This represents the dwelling of Christ in our hearts by faith ; and also the sweetness and preciousness of Christ to believers. “ He is a bundle of myrrh, and a cluster of cypress-flowers ; something, nay, everything which is pleasant and delightful. There is a complicated sweetness in Christ, and an abundance of it.”

The word here translated *camphire*, or *cypress*, is in the Hebrew *copher*, and signifies *atonement* or *propitiation*. And this is the very thing which makes Christ so sweet and precious to believers, because through him they have “received the atonement”—he is the “propitiation for their sins.” “Unto you therefore which believe he is precious.”

Observe what a stress and emphasis the Spouse lays upon the application of this to herself—“My Beloved is unto *me*,” she says ; and again, “My Beloved is unto *me*” all that is sweet and precious. Whatever he may be to others, this is what he is to *me*—“who loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*”—“my Lord and my God.” Such is the language of an appropriating faith.

The manner in which Christ is cherished in the hearts of believers, at all times, and in all places—imparting a sweetness and satisfaction to the soul, and a fragrance (as it were)

to the whole character—is an idea very beautifully conveyed by the “bundle of myrrh all night in the bosom.” True religion may thus be regarded, not as a dress to be put on and off as convenience may require; but rather as some precious keepsake to be worn in the bosom continually, by night and by day; too much valued, and too well cherished, to be laid aside for a moment. “When thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.”

—Prov. 6, v. 22.

III.

THE BRIDEGROOM'S RENEWED COMMENDATION OF THE BRIDE.

FAIR WITH DOVES' EYES—THE LILY AMONG THORNS.

Behold thou art fair, my love; behold thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.—Chap. 1, v. 15.

FAIR WITH DOVES' EYES.

“*Behold thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes.*”—The Bride, in her humility, had before spoken of herself as “black;” but the Bridegroom here declares that in his estimation she was “fair;” and that her beauty consisted very much in this, that she had “doves' eyes.” This denotes eyes chaste and constant; for doves are the common emblems of chastity and constancy. The eyes of the renewed and sanctified soul are continually “looking unto Jesus” in faith and love; and thereby the soul is more and more changed into his image and likeness; and hence is derived its beauty, which is the “beauty of holiness.”

"Those are fair in Christ's account, who have, not the piercing eye of the eagle, but the pure and chaste eye of the dove; not like the hawk, who when he mounts upward still has his eye upon the prey on earth, but an humble modest eye; such an eye as indicates a simplicity and godly sincerity, and a dovelike innocency; eyes enlightened and guided by the Holy Spirit, that blessed heavenly Dove."

—*M. Henry.*

THE LILY AMONG THORNS.

"As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters."—“Ye are not of the world,” said Christ to his disciples, “even as I am not of the world.” In this respect the followers of Christ are as lilies among thorns. “The wicked and worldly, such as have no love to Christ, are as *thorns*, worthless; nay, even noxious and hurtful; they came in with sin, and are a fruit of the curse; they choke good seed, and hinder good fruit, and their end is to be burned. God’s people are as *lilies* among them; scratched and torn, shaded and obscured by them; dear to Christ, and yet exposed to hardships and troubles in the world. But the lily, which is now among thorns, shall shortly be transplanted out of this wilderness below into the Paradise above—where, it is said, “there shall no more be a pricking briar, or a grieving thorn.”

“I will be as the dew unto Israel, he shall grow as the lily.”—Hos. 14, v. 5.

The mention of the “rose” and the “lily,” as emblems of the Bride’s loveliness, may serve to remind us that *flowers* appear to be the only part of Creation, which have quite escaped the effects of the Fall of Man, and which still bloom as fair and fragrant as they did in their original native garden of Eden.

We shall need no apology for introducing the beautiful stanzas of the Poet of the Christian Year, written on our Saviour's words, "Consider the lilies of the field":

Relics ye are of Eden's bowers,
As pure, as fragrant, and as fair,
As when ye crown'd the sunshine hours
Of happy wanderers there.

Fall'n all beside—the world of life,
How is it stained with fear and strife!
In Reason's world what storms are rife,
What passions range and glare.

But cheerful and unchang'd the while,
Your first and perfect form ye shew;
The same that won Eve's matron smile
In the world's opening glow.

The stars of Heaven a course are taught
Too high above our human thought;—
Ye may be found if ye are sought;
And as we gaze, we know.

Ye dwell beside our paths and homes,
Our paths of sin, our homes of sorrow,
And guilty man, where'er he roams,
Your innocent mirth may borrow.
The birds of air before us fleet,
They cannot brook our shame to meet—
But we may taste your solace sweet,
And come again to-morrow.

Ye fearless in your nests abide—
Nor may we scorn (too proudly wise)
Your silent lessons, undescried
By all but lowly eyes:
For ye could draw the admiring gaze
Of Him, who worlds and hearts surveys:
Your order wild, your fragrant maze,
He taught us how to prize.

Keble.

IV.

THE BRIDE'S RENEWED COMMENDATION OF THE
BRIDEGROOM.

THE APPLE-TREE IN THE WOOD—THE BANNER OF LOVE.

As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to his banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.—Chap. 2, v. 3, &c.

THE APPLE-TREE IN THE WOOD.

*“As the Apple-tree among the trees of the wood, &c.”—*Above all that is beautiful, or noble, or excellent upon earth, Christ hath the preeminence ; even as the Apple or Citron-tree among the trees of the wood.

Christ is to his people as a delightful and refreshing tree, both for shade, and for fruit. “I sat down under his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.”

1. There is *shade*—This image is not such a striking one to us, nor so delightful to our thoughts, as it would be if we lived in the East, where the heat of the sun is more intense, and where shade is less frequent. But *there* nothing can be more delightful and refreshing to the weary traveller than the shadow, either of a great rock, or of a great tree. Christ is compared in Scripture to both of these. “He shades the believer from the just anger of Deity, and its consequences ; and those who weary themselves in vain by seeking salvation at the foot of burning mount Sinai, may find rest and safety under the shadow of the Cross of Christ. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

He shades them, moreover, not only from the just wrath

of God, but also from the scorching heat of persecution, or public calamity : “The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand ; the sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.”

2. There is *fruit* as well as shade. “This tree drops its fruits to those, who sit under its shadow, and they are welcome to them, and they will find them sweet to their taste. Believers have *tasted* that the Lord is gracious. His promises are sweet to them, yea, and his precepts too. Pardons are sweet ; peace of conscience is sweet ; the hopes of eternal life, and present foretastes of it, are sweet ; all sweet to those, who have their spiritual senses exercised.” These are fruits, sweet to the taste, which are supplied by the Tree of Life to those, who sit under the shadow of it. “I sat under his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.”

THE BANNER OF LOVE.

“*He brought me to his banqueting house, and his banner over me was love,*” &c.—The most close union subsists, and the most sweet communion, between Christ and the believing soul ; and there are times and seasons when such manifestations of Christ’s love are made to the soul, as pass the power of words to express ; and which can only be known by personal inward experience.

Such communion with Christ is as a banquet to the soul ; and the place, whether public or private, where it is enjoyed, is as a “banqueting house.” The banner, which is there displayed, is the banner of Christ’s love. It is that love, which conquers the soul, and leads it a willing captive ; and under which the soul delights to sit, and will sit delighted for ever.

Bp. Patrick on this place gives the following very apt quotation in his Annotations—“Delherus, in his Electa,

lib. 3, c. 9, hath not unfitly glossed upon the words thus : ‘ The banner of our Lord is his love, which he hath publicly declared to us, that he might draw us to himself ; by which also, when we are come to him, he retains us with him ; and strengthens us by the same, when we fight with our spiritual enemies. And that we may always look upon it, and never quail, he carries it over us ; that is, renders his love most familiar to us. He that knows not this banner can be none of his soldiers ; and he that deserts it is undone, unless he presently return to it. So that as the Roman legions had their several names (one of which was called the *pious*, another the *faithful*, another the *thundering*, another the *victorious*, &c.) in like manner the Christian band may be called ‘ amoris legio,’ the ‘ legion of love.’ ”

The Bride, now enjoying to the full the presence of her Beloved, is most anxious that nothing should disturb and break off this enjoyment. In like manner “ those, who experience the sweetness of communion with Christ, and the sensible manifestations of his love, cannot but desire the continuance of these blessed views, of these blessed visits. Peter would make tabernacles on the holy mount.—Matt. 17, v. 4. Yet Christ will, when he pleases, withdraw those extraordinary communications of himself. Our care it must be that we do nothing to provoke him to withdraw them ; that we carefully watch over our own hearts, and suppress every thought that may grieve his good Spirit. Let those that have comfort be afraid of sinning it away.”—*M. Henry.*

I charge you, all ye earthly toys,
Approach not to disturb my joys ;
Nor sin, nor hell, come near my heart
To cause my Saviour to depart.

Watts.

THIRD CANTICLE.

THE BRIDEGROOM'S CALL TO THE BRIDE, AND HER RESPONSE TO THE CALL.

PLAN OF THE CANTICLE.

The Bride, whilst in her retirement, suddenly hears the well-known sound of her Beloved's voice.

He is represented as having hastened to her from a distance, and is compared to a "roe or a young hart," "leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills." He makes his appearance at the lattice-windows of her arbour, or garden retreat ; and invites her to come forth to him, and enjoy the beauties of the Spring.

In reply to his affectionate and urgent address, she goes forth to him ; and, delighted with his society, gives expression to her earnest desire that she may continue to enjoy it ; or that, whenever he might be obliged to leave her, he would speedily return.

THIRD CANTICLE.

Ch. II., v. 8—17.

Authorised version and arrangement.

8. The voice of my Beloved ! behold he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. 9. My Beloved is (*a*) like a roe or a young hart : behold, he standeth behind our (*b*) wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice. 10. My Beloved spake, and said unto me, 'Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. 11. For, lo, the (*c*) winter is past, the rain is over and gone ; 12. The flowers appear on the earth ; the time of the (*d*) singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our

land ; 13. The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the (*e*) vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. 14. O my (*f*) dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice ; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.' 15. Take us the (*g*) foxes, the little foxes, that (*h*) spoil the vines : for our vines have tender grapes. 16. My Beloved is mine, and I am his : he feedeth among the lilies. 17. Until the (*i*) day break, and the shadows flee away, turn my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether.

*Revised Version arranged in the form of Dialogue, chiefly after
Bp. Percy and Dr. Mason Good.*

BRIDE.

The voice of my Beloved ! behold he cometh, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. My Beloved is like a roe or a young hart.

Behold he standeth without our wall (*fence*) ; he looketh in through the windows ; he sheweth himself at the lattice.

My Beloved spake, and said unto me ;

THE BRIDEGROOM'S CALL.

' Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past ; the rain is over and gone ; the flowers appear on the earth :

' The season of the song is come back ; and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land :

' The fig-tree putteth forth (*or sweeteneth*) her green figs, and the vines in blossom give a fragrant smell :

' Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away ;

' O my dove, through the clefts of the rocks, in the hiding place of the precipice, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice ; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is lovely.'

BRIDEGROOM (TO HIS COMPANIONS).

Go ye, my companions ; hunt for us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines ; for our vines have tender grapes.

BRIDE (GOING FORTH TO HIM).

My Beloved is mine, and I am his ; he feedeth among the lilies ;

Till the day break (*breathe*), and the shadows flee away ; turn, my Beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart on the mountains of Bether.

PARAPHRASE.

BRIDE.

The voice of my Beloved ! lo, he comes,
 Over the hills bounding, so light of foot,
 E'en as the mountain-roe, the wild gazelle—
 He comes ; and stands without ; and thro' each lattice
 Looks with love's eager eyes, but looks in vain—
 Hark ! 'tis his well-known voice ! he calls to me !

BRIDEGROOM'S CALL.

Rise up, my love ! my fair one ! and come away ;
 For, lo, winter is past ; the rains are over and gone ;
 The flowers are springing afresh beneath our feet ;
 The season of song is come back, the long-hush'd birds
 Are opening again their woodland melodies ;
 The nightingale's trilling note is heard in our land,
 And the soft-cooing voice of the gentle turtle-dove ;
 The fig-tree puts forth her yet green fruit to the sun ;
 The fragrant smell of the blossoming vines fills the air—
 O my Dove ! look out from thy nest in the craggy cliff ;
 Thy face let me see, the sound of thy voice let me hear ;
 For sweet is thy voice, oh ! sweet ! and thy face is fair, oh !
 fair !

BRIDEGROOM (TO HIS COMPANIONS).

Go, leave me now, my friends ; go, hunt for us
 The little foxes, which do spoil our grapes,
 Our tender early grapes—

BRIDE.

O blissful hour !

O hour of purest happiness ! for now
 My own Beloved 's mine, and I am his—
 He feeds among the lilies—turn to me,
 My lov'd one ! turn, and leave me not, until
 Night's shadows flee before the break of day,

The freshly breathing morn—and when thou goest,
Be thou to me with quick returning step
Like the young bounding hart on Bether's mountains

THIRD CANTICLE.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

(a) *My beloved is like a roe or a young hart.* This was a comparison common among the Hebrews (as it is among all eastern poets to this day), when wishing to describe, either beauty of form, or swiftness of foot. Saul is thus spoken of, 2 Sam., 1, v. 19., as the “roe of Israel;” and in v. 18 of the next chapter we are told that “Asahel was light of foot as a wild roe.”

(b) *He standeth behind our wall.* Dr. Good on this place quotes some remarks of Mr. Harmer to the effect that the Hebrew word translated “wall” signifies the green wall or fence of a *chiosk*, or eastern arbour; one of which is thus described by Lady M. W. Montagu:—“In the midst of the garden is the *chiosk*; that is, a large room, commonly beautified with a fine fountain in the centre of it. It is raised nine or ten steps, and inclosed with gilded lattices; round which vines, jessamines, and honeysuckles, make a sort of green wall. Large trees are planted round the place, which is the scene of their greatest pleasures.”

It is supposed to have been from a chiosk, or summer-house of this kind, that the mother of Sisera looked out, and enquired concerning her son’s return. Judges 5, v. 20. “The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice.”

(c) *The winter is past, the rains are over and gone.* The winter, or rainy season, continues in those countries up to about March ; when the Spring succeeds, which in their climate is the most beautiful season of the year ; corresponding to our months of May and June.

(d) *The singing of birds is come.* Mr. Harmer conjectures that the singing of the nightingale is here especially alluded to. And with regard to the “voice of the turtle,” a recent traveller in Judea says, “The low plaint of the turtle-dove may be heard all the day long, at certain seasons, in the olive-groves, and in the solitary and shady vallies among these mountains.”—(*The Land and the Book.*)

(e) *The vines in blossom give a good smell.* Pliny has remarked that there is no smell to be preferred for sweetness to that of the vines when in blossom.

Bp. Percy quotes a passage from Sir Thomas Brown’s *Observations*, in which he says ; “That the flowers of the vine should be emphatically noted to give a pleasant smell seems hard to our northern nostrils, which discover not such odours, and smell them not in full vineyards : Whereas in hot regions, and in more spread and digested flowers, a sweet smell may be allowed, denotable from several expressions, and from the practice of the ancients, in putting the dried flowers of the vine into new wine, to give it a pure or flosculous race or spirit, allowing to every *cadus* two pounds of such flowers.”

(f) *O my dove, through the clefts of the rock, &c.* Eastern doves are wont to hide themselves in the clefts and caverns of rocks. “Solomon therefore, having personified his beloved under the character of a dove, here boldly ascribes to her the manners of that timid bird ; and, secluded as she was from him, requests her to quit the shelter which the clefts of the rocks, and the caves or hollows of the precipices, had afforded her.”—*Good.*

(g) *To take for us the foxes.* It has been thought, with every appearance of reason, that some companions and friends

of the Bridegroom are here addressed ; and are sent by him on an expedition against the foxes.—The suffix to the verb being in the masculine plural favours this view.

(h) *The foxes that destroy the vines.* Ep. Patrick says, “ Foxes abound in Palestine, and are observed by many authors to love grapes, and to make great devastation in vineyards. Insomuch that Aristophanes in his *Equites* compares soldiers to foxes ; spoiling whole countries, as these do vineyards.”

“ Galen in his book of *Aliments* tells us that the hunters in his country did not scruple to eat the flesh of foxes in autumn, when they were grown fat with feeding on grapes.”

(i) *Till the day break.* The original Hebrew expression means “ till the day breathe ;” which Dr. Good takes to signify the revival of the day, or of nature, at early dawn. At midnight all nature lies dead, and

“ Not a breath disturbs the deep serenc.”

The shadows at length fly, the morning breathes, and nature revives.

Others with Dr. Percy consider that an allusion is made to the breeze which usually, in those countries, ushers in the rising of the Sun. “ The dawn of day is there attended with a fine refreshing breeze, even more grateful than the return of day itself.”

Both these senses, however, may very well be taken together as illustrative of one and the same idea—the refreshing breeze at dawn being understood as the breath of reviving day.

THE CANTICLES OF THE
THIRD CANTICLE.

PRACTICAL COMMENTS.

THE BRIDEGROOM'S COMING AND CALL—THE BRIDE'S RESPONSE
TO THE CALL.

I.

THE BRIDEGROOM'S COMING AND CALL.

THE ROE UPON THE MOUNTAINS.

The voice of my beloved ! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a roe or a young hart.—Chap. 2, v. 8, 9.

This comparison, applied to Christ the heavenly Bridegroom, may well serve to represent the alacrity with which he came at the first for our *redemption*; and with which he also still comes, in the hour of distress and danger, for our *relief*—even as a roe leaping upon the mountains, as a young hart bounding over the hills.

1. As regards the work of our *redemption*; which was so arduous a work, and to be accompanied with so much suffering; with what cheerfulness did he undertake it, with what alacrity did he come to perform it ! In view of this he could say, “Lo, I come to do thy will, O my God. I delight to do thy will ; yea, thy law is within my heart.” On this point it has been well observed by M. Henry, “He comes slighting and surmounting all the difficulties that lay in his way ; he comes leaping over the mountains, skipping over the hills ; making nothing of the discouragements he was to break through. The curse of the law, the death of the cross, must

be undergone ; all the powers of darkness must be grappled with ; but before the resolutions of his love these great mountains become plains."

2. As regards the work of present *relief*, as well as of past redemption.—The Saviour is equally ready to come now for the deliverance of his people in every time of difficulty and danger ; or for their support and comfort in every time of distress. " How often hath his Church in the most perilous circumstances experienced his delivering hand ! And how often have we, as individuals, found him to be a ' very present help in time of trouble ! '

THE WALL AND THE LATTICE.

Behold he standeth behind our wall ; he looketh forth at the windows ; shewing himself through the lattice.—Chap. 2, v. 9.

Allegorically viewed this may well suggest the imperfect glimpses of Christ, which were given to them who lived under the old dispensation, before his coming in the flesh ; when they could only see him through types and figures, in ceremonies and sacrifices.

" Such was the state of the Old Testament Church, while it was in expectation of the coming of the Messiah. The ceremonial law is called a *wall of partition* (Ephes. 2, v. 14) ; but Christ stood behind that wall. They had him near them ; they had him with them, though they could not see him clearly. He that was the substance was not far off from the shadows. They saw him looking through the windows of the ceremonial institutions, and smiling through those lattices. In their sacrifices and purifications Christ discovered himself to them, and gave them intimations and earnts of his grace, both to engage and to encourage their longings for his *first* coming.

" Such also is our present state in comparison with what it will be at Christ's *second* coming. We now see him through

a glass darkly, but not face to face as we hope to see him shortly. In the sacraments Christ is near us, but it is behind the *wall* of external signs ; through those *lattices* he manifests himself to us ; but we shall shortly see him as he is."—*M. Henry.*

"Now likewise it is only through latticed windows that we see him at all, even when the vision is brightest. By the eye of faith we discern him through the word, through the sacraments, through prayer ; yet these are but lattices of divided light, that yield a glimpse, but no full vision, of the Beloved ; at once disclosing and concealing the Desire of our eyes. Yet beauteous windows they are, through which the Beloved looks ; lovely lattices, when by them the Bridegroom shows himself."—*Stuart.*

THE SPRING-TIME.

For lo the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth. The time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. The fig-tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines in blossom give a good smell.—Chap. 2, v. 11—13.

1. The Spring-time, which is here so beautifully described, coming after the cold and cheerless season of winter—the rains over and gone ; the flowers appearing ; the birds warbling ; the vines blossoming, and filling the air with fragrance—may be taken as emblematical of Gospel-times coming after the long, cold, and dark period of the dispensation of the Law, which was as winter to the Church. With reference to this St. John expressly says, "the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth."

2. The Spring-time may also well represent the time of the soul's conversion from a state of nature to a state of grace. "That blessed change is like the return of the Spring ; an universal change, and a very comfortable one ; it is

a new creation ; it is being born again. The soul that was hard, and cold, and frozen, and unprofitable, like the earth in winter, becomes fruitful like the earth in Spring ; and by degrees, like it, brings its fruits to perfection. This spiritual change is owing to the approaches and influences of the Sun, even the Sun of righteousness."—*M. Henry.*

3. The Spring-time moreover, being a sort of resurrection-time, may very properly be taken as representing the resurrection of our body at the last day, and the glory to be then revealed. "The bones that lay in the grave, as the roots of plants in the ground during winter, shall then *flourish as a herb*.—Isaiah 66, v. 14. That will be an eternal farewell to winter, and a joyful entrance upon an everlasting Spring."

Lessons sweet of Spring returning,
 Welcome to the thoughtful heart !
 May I call ye sense or learning,
 Instinct pure, or heavenly art ?
 Be your title what it may,
 Sweet the lengthening April day,
 While with you the soul is free,
 Ranging wild o'er hill and lea.
 Soft as Memnon's harp at morning,
 To the inward ear devout,
 Touch'd by light, with heavenly warning
 Your transporting chords ring out.
 Every leaf in every nook,
 Every wave in every brook,
 Chanting with a solemn voice,
 Minds us of our better choice.

Keble.

THE DOVE IN THE CLEFTS OF THE ROCKS.

O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rocks, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice ; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.

The Bride, the Church, is here spoken of as a *Dove* ; and a most suitable emblem it is, so well describing the true Christian character. For dove-like indeed are the traits of

character which belong to the true Christian, to the true disciple and follower of Christ.

“Be ye harmless as doves,” is one of the precepts given by the Saviour himself to his disciples and followers, who are required in this respect, as in others, to imitate their Master, who was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.”

The Spirit descended like a Dove on Christ ; and so he does on all who are Christ’s, making them of a meek and quiet spirit. The regenerate soul is Christ’s dove ; she can find no rest but in him ; who is to her as the Ark in the midst of the waters.

But the Dove is here described as being in the *cleft of the rocks*. This evidently denotes her as seeking a hiding-place, a refuge—and what refuge can there be for the soul, but in the cleft of that rock, which is Christ ?

“Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.”

There is however another view—the Dove in the clefts of the rocks may be taken as representing the retirement of Christians from the world, with a view to escape, either from its temptations, or from its persecutions. And in this sense it is that David exclaims, Ps. 55, v. 6, “Oh that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest !”

Far from the world, O Lord, I flee,
From strife and tumult far ;
From scenes where Satan wages still
His most successful war.

The calm retreat, the silent shade,
With prayer and praise agree ;
And seem by thy sweet bounty made
For those who follow thee.

Cowper.

Mr. Williams well remarks on this view of the subject, “The dove is a feeble, timid, and defenceless bird, and may

therefore seek to hide itself in such recesses from the birds of prey, or from the storms of winter. And how often has this been the case with the Church ! How often has she been glad to hide herself in woods and solitary places ; yea, in caverns and in clefts of the rocks ; to escape from the storms of persecution, or the rage of persecutors ; and in these retirements to worship God, and enjoy communion with Him. Oh ! ye Waldenses—ye Albigenses—ye Piedmontese—how often was this your case ?”

It must be noted, however, that there is sometimes a tendency in Christians to an *undue retirement* and seclusion from the world—arising, it may be, partly from an unwillingness to bear the Cross, and partly from a fear of being overcome by temptation. It was this feeling, which in early times led so many sincere but weak Christians into the hermit life. Christ gently reproves such timid conduct in his disciples ; and bids them come forth, and shew themselves—“ Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice—for thy voice is sweet, and thy countenance is comely.”

The voice of the true Christian is indeed sweet to a heavenly ear ; when that voice is used in confessing Christ before men ; or when it is employed in offering prayer and praise, those “ spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” “ Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.”

* * * * *

The Bridegroom, having thus finished his invitation or call to the Bride, gives directions to his companions to go, and hunt

THE FOXES THAT SPOIL THE VINES.

“ *Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines : for our vines have tender grapes.*” In making a spiritual

application of this we may interpret the term “foxes,” either of sins still lurking in the heart and life of the Christian, which must be watched, taken, and destroyed—or else of those enemies of the Church, who would injure it; whether by persecutions, or by errors, heresies, and schisms.

Matthew Henry on the passage has these very apt observations—“Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that creep in insensibly; for though they are little they do great mischief; they spoil the vines, which they must not be suffered to do at any time, and especially now when our vines have *tender grapes* that must be preserved, or the vintage will fail. Believers are as vines, weak but useful plants; their fruits are as tender grapes at first, which must have time to come to maturity.

This charge to take the foxes is

1. A charge to individual believers to mortify their own corruptions, their sinful appetites and passions; which are as foxes, little foxes, that destroy their graces and comforts, crush good beginnings, and prevent them from coming to perfection. Seize the “little foxes;” those sins which seem little, but they often prove very dangerous. Whatever we find a hindrance to us in that which is good we must put away.

2. A charge to all in their places to oppose and prevent the spreading of such opinions and practices as tend to corrupt men’s judgments, perplex their minds, and discourage their inclinations to virtue and piety. Persecutors are foxes (Luke 13, v. 32); false prophets or teachers are foxes (Ezek. 13, v. 4). Those who sow the tares of heresy and schism; and, like Diotrephes, trouble the peace of the Church, and obstruct the progress of the Gospel; they are the foxes, the little foxes, which must be taken.”

II.

THE BRIDE'S RESPONSE TO THE CALL.

THE UNION ASSURED—THE STAY DESIRED.

My beloved is mine, and I am his; he feedeth among the lilies. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my Beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart on the mountains of Bether.—Chp. 2, v. 16—17.

THE UNION ASSURED.

“*My beloved is mine and I am his.*” The Bride responds consentingly to the Bridegroom’s invitation to come forth from her retirement. She comes forth to him at his call; and in the liveliest terms expresses her satisfaction at the sweet assurance of his love, which she thus enjoys, and the communion with him of which she partakes. All doubt therefore and fear being now removed, she can both say and feel, “My beloved is mine, and I am his.”

This is true of each individual soul, which is united to Christ by a living faith, and by the indwelling of his Spirit. The truth of it may not indeed always be *felt* by the individual—the sweet *assurance* of it may not always be enjoyed—for too often doubts and fears prevail, and come between us and our Saviour, as clouds which hide the Sun. Nevertheless the Sun still shines; and it is still true, whether *felt* or not, that every sincere believer is Christ’s own, and Christ in like manner is his.

“Is it asked how they come to have this propriety in each other? I reply

1. By *mutual choice*—‘I have loved thee,’ saith the Lord, ‘with an everlasting love, and therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee’—‘We love him, because he first loved us.’

2. By *converting grace*—‘ I have called thee by thy name thou art mine ’—They that are with the Lamb are ‘ called,’ and ‘ chosen,’ and ‘ faithful.’

3. By *covenant engagement*—‘ One shall say I am the Lord’s, and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord.’

4. By *union of spirit*—Our first father Adam said of his fair companion Eve, ‘ She is now love of my love, and flesh of my flesh ;’ but the relation between Christ and his Church, as it is spiritual, so is it more intimate. ‘ He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.’”—*Williams.*

Yes ! He is mine—and nought of earthly things,
 Not all the charms of pleasure, wealth, or power,
 The fame of heroes, or the pomp of kings,
 Could tempt me to forego His love one hour ;
 ‘ Go, worthless world,’ I cry, ‘ with all that ’s thine ;
 For I my Saviour’s am, and He is mine.’

Lyte.

THE STAY DESIRED.

“ *Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my Beloved,*” The Bride, delighted with her Beloved’s presence, desires his stay with her as long as possible ; and in case he should be obliged to depart from her for a season, she longs for his speedy return. She therefore expresses her wish that he might be to her as a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether, i.e., upon the mountains of “division” or of “separation,” as the Hebrew word might be rendered.

The spiritual application of this is clear. The enjoyment of Christ’s presence, and communion with him, are the believer’s highest happiness. Sweet and precious are those seasons when the soul is thus favoured. They are to us as heaven upon earth ; and we would have them last always. This therefore is the believer’s great desire, the subject of his

constant prayer—that Christ may dwell in his heart by faith, and may abide with him by his Spirit continually. The Christian's feelings on this point are expressed with equal beauty and correctness in the following language of a well-known hymn,

Abide with me ! fast falls the even-tide ;
 The darkness deepens ; Lord, with me abide !
 When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
 Help of the helpless, O abide with me !

Not a brief glance I beg, a passing word ;
 But, as thou dwell'st with thy disciples, Lord ;
 Familiar, condescending, patient, free ;
 Come, not to sojourn, but abide with me.

I need thy presence every passing hour ;
 What but thy grace can foil the Tempter's power ?
 Who like thyself my guide and stay can be ?
 Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me !

I fear no foe, with thee at hand to bless :
 Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness :
 Where is death's sting ? where, grave, thy victory ?
 I triumph still, if thou abide with me !

Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes !
 Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies !
 Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee ;
 In life, in death, O Lord abide with me !

Lyte.

FOURTH CANTICLE.

THE BRIDE'S MIDNIGHT SEARCH AFTER HER BELOVED.

PLAN OF THE CANTICLE.

The Bride, (whether in a dream or in reality,) having expected the Bridegroom's return at the hour of rest, is disappointed of her expectation. And, being filled with restless anxiety on account of his absence, she overlooks all other considerations, and leaves her home in quest of him. After diligent search, and enquiry of the watchmen whom she meets, she suddenly finds him ; and clinging closely to him she will not let him go, until she has brought him into her mother's house. She then charges the daughters of Jerusalem not to disturb nor awake her Beloved till he please.

FOURTH CANTICLE.

Ch. III, v. 1—5.

Authorised version and arrangement.

1. (a) By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth : I sought him, but I found him not. 2. I will rise now, and (b) go about the city in the streets, and in the broadways I will seek him whom my soul loveth : I sought him, but I found him not. 3. The (c) watchmen that go about the city found me : to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth ? 4. It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth : I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my (d) mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me. 5. (e) I

charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the fields, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.

Revised Version arranged chiefly after Bp. Percy and Dr. Mason Good.

BRIDE.

On my bed in the night I sought him whom my soul loveth ; I sought him, but I found him not.

I said, 'I will rise now, and go about the city. In the streets, and in the broad-ways will I seek him whom my soul loveth.' I sought him, but I found him not.

The watchmen of the city found me ; to whom I said, 'Saw ye him whom my soul loveth ?'

But a little had I passed from them, when I found him, whom my soul loveth.

I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.

I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the hinds of the fields, that ye stir not up nor awake my beloved, until he please.

PARAPHRASE.

BRIDE.

Laid restless on my bed, in the night watches,
I sought my soul's Beloved, but in vain ;
I sought, and found him not—' Why restless here,
And anxious lie ? Such my self-communing—
' I will arise, go forth, and thro' the city,
Yea, through its every broad-way, street, and lane,
Seek whom my soul doth love so fervently.'
The watchmen met with me ; I ask'd of them,
' Have ye my lov'd one seen ? Scarce had I gone
A little from them, when my love himself,
Sought for so long, I found—With fond embrace,
And firm, I held him ; nor would let him go,
Till I had brought him to my mother's house ;

E'en to her chamber, where pure wedded love
So oft had rested, and shall rest again.
I charge you, Sion's daughters, softly tread,
As would the hunter of the shy gazelles ;
Lest my Beloved be untimely stirr'd,
And the sweet chain with which I'm bound be broken.

FOURTH CANTICLE.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

(a) *On my bed in the night.* It is supposed by several Commentators that this Canticle contains an account, not of any real transaction which took place, but merely of a dream which the Bride had, and which she relates in the morning to her companions. Williams's remarks on this point are worthy of note : " This scene evidently opens with the morning ; and I confess myself well satisfied with the hypothesis that it relates a dream of the Spouse. Solomon says, ' A dream cometh from the multitude of business ; ' and without entering into the theory of dreaming, we may observe from our own experience that the same objects, which exercise the mind by day, often agitate it by night. The merchant dreams of his business, the sportsman of the chase, and the lover of the beloved object. Thus it was with the Spouse here. She had been ardently desirous of the presence of her beloved, and in her dream she anticipates his return ; ' on my bed in the night I sought him,' " &c.

At the same time there are others, who contend that a real transaction is here meant, and not a mere dream. Mr. Fry states his view of it thus : " A circumstance in domestic life, among the lower or middle classes of society, forms the subject of this Idyl. The scene is not, as is usual, laid in the

country, but in the city. The faithful wife, it is supposed, had in vain been expecting the return of her husband at the hour of rest. Filled with anxiety she leaves the house in quest of him," &c.

But whichever view we may take of this point, the object and purpose of the description is evidently the same, viz., to shew forth the deep attachment of the Bride to her Beloved ; how impossible it was for her to rest without him ; and her readiness to meet every difficulty, and to encounter every hardship, for his sake.

(b) *And will go about the city, &c.* The Bride here appears before us in a very different situation to what she did before. Instead of seeing her in the King's Palace, and sitting with the King at his table, we now find her going about the city by night. But still, as we have remarked in the preceding note, all the changes of scene, which take place, only tend to promote the general object of the drama, which is to shew the intense mutual love subsisting between the Bridegroom and the Bride ; and in this point of view it matters but little whether we consider the Canticle as relating a real transaction, or merely a dream.

(c) *The watchmen of the city found me.* We observe that watchmen are referred to in different parts of Scripture : " I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem ; " " Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice, with the voice together shall they sing."—Is : 52, v. 8.

This allusion to the singing of Zion's watchmen may refer to the custom which anciently prevailed of certain Priests and Levites keeping watch about the temple, and at fixed hours singing psalms of prayer and praise.

A similar custom still exists in many towns of Germany, where the watchmen are to be heard in their nightly rounds singing some of the soul-stirring hymns of their fatherland ; which, it has been remarked, have often been blessed of God to the awakening of souls asleep in sin, and wrapped in the darkness of spiritual death.

“ In Berlin, at the end of the last century, there was a watchman, named Christian Mende. He was a model of his class, and for twenty-five years performed the duty of a watchman with such zeal and love that he often said, ‘ It is a most glorious profession, for during the whole night I am alone with my Lord ! ’ He was a living hymn-book, and during his nightly walks sung the most beautiful and powerful hymns, with such hearty fervour, that he became thereby a great blessing to many ; for he usually selected so skilfully the verses which he sung, that they were the most suitable for each house ; cheering the poor and afflicted ; comforting the sick ; and warning those who were walking in evil ways.”

—*Sunday at Home*, No. 612.

(d) *My mother's chamber.* Mr. Fry remarks that the word here translated “ chamber ” properly signifies a veil—the veil or curtain especially, which separated the farther part of a tent from the midst. It is particularly applied to a sleeping apartment. What Dr. Shaw says in his Travels concerning the structure of houses in Barbary, and the Levant, may give some light. “ Their chambers are large and spacious, one of them frequently serving a whole family. At one end of each chamber there is a little gallery raised four or five feet, with a ballustrade, and a veil to draw in front of it. Here they place their beds.” This shews the meaning of 1 Kings 20, v. 30, &c., an : “ inner chamber,” or a “ chamber in a chamber.”

(e) *I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, &c.* This has occurred before at the close of the second Canticle, and occurs again at the close of the tenth Canticle. It forms an example of what Dr. Good calls the “ *periodic iteration* ;” and constitutes a kind of “ general chorus, or burden, for the whole set of Canticles, of which the Song of Songs is composed. Among the sacred poets the periodic iteration appears to have been in greatest favour with the Psalmist, who is continually resorting to it.”

FOURTH CANTICLE.

PRACTICAL COMMENTS.

THE BELOVED ABSENT—THE BELOVED SEARCHED FOR—THE BELOVED FOUND.

I.
THE BELOVED ABSENT.

On my bed in the night I sought him, whom my soul loveth ; I sought him, but I found him not.—Chap. 3, v. 1.

A spiritual application of this to the believing soul may be made in two ways ;

1. We may suppose a season of *spiritual negligence and sloth*, as indicated by the terms “on my bed in the night.” During such a season the Saviour’s presence is withdrawn ; when the soul, feeling restless and unsatisfied without its Beloved, is stirred up to seek him afresh, until it again finds him, and enjoys his presence as before.

There can be no doubt that such is too often the Christian’s experience. The soul, even after it has been thoroughly awakened and renewed, is still subject to these relapses into a state of drowsiness and slothfulness. In our Lord’s Parable, for instance, of the Ten Virgins, it is said of the wise, as well as of the foolish : “ while the Bridegroom tarried, they *all* slumbered and slept.” And St. Paul, writing to the Christians at Rome, intimated that they had, to a certain extent, relapsed into this kind of soul-sleep ; for he warns them that “ it is now high time to awake out of sleep, seeing that our salvation is nearer than when we believed.”

These words of the Bride, “on my bed in the night,” may thus be spiritually applied, as referring to a season of dulness and slothfulness in the believing soul, during which the Saviour withdraws his presence.

Think not of rest ; though dreams be sweet,
 Start up, and ply your heaven-ward feet :
 Is not God’s oath upon your head,
 Ne’er to sink back on slothful bed,
 Never again your loins untie,
 Nor let your torches waste and die,
 Till, when the shadows thickest fall,
 Ye hear your Master’s midnight call ?

Keble.

2. We may suppose, however, a very different state of things ; and the words may be applied in a very different sense. They may be taken to denote the *all-absorbing nature of the Bride’s affection for her Beloved* ; to shew how much her mind was occupied, not only by day, but also by night, with the thought of him, and the desire for his presence. “With my soul have I desired thee in the night ; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early.”—Is. 26, v. 9. David tells us repeatedly how much his own mind was thus occupied with God his Saviour in the night-season : He says, “I remember thee on my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches.” “I have remembered thy name, O Lord, in the night.” “In the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.”

In this sense it might be said that the Bride sought him whom her soul loved ; she sought him, but she found him not. But how is this seeking, and not finding, to be accounted for ? Is there not the promise, “they who seek shall find ?” Yes, it is a promise, which God has given us for our encouragement in prayer ; and the promise will in due time be most certainly fulfilled. And as a general rule it will be fulfilled at once. Nevertheless it may sometimes please

God to keep us waiting for its fulfilment. He may withdraw himself for awhile, and seem as if he heard not.

So it was with the Bride on the present occasion. As she lay restless and comfortless on her bed, in the night season, she sought the Beloved of her soul, but found him not. Her state of mind is well described by the Psalmist, where he says, “I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice. In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord ; my soul refused to be comforted ; I remembered God, and was troubled ; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed ; Thou holdest mine eyes waking ; I call to remembrance my song in the night, I commune with my own heart, and my spirit made diligent search.”—Ps : 77, v. 1, &c.

II.

THE BELOVED SEARCHED FOR.

I will rise now, and go about the city, in the streets, and in the broad ways, I will seek him, whom my soul loveth. I sought him, but I found him not. The watchmen of the city met with me, to whom I said, ‘Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?’—Chap. 3, v. 2—3.

“*I will rise now.*”—This was a good resolve. To have staid where she was, with her Beloved still absent from her, and her soul still comfortless without him, would have been only to prolong her uneasiness and unhappiness. She did well therefore when she resolved “I will arise.” Even though it was a resolve to leave her bed, and to go forth into the night, both of which were acts of self-denial, and contrary to flesh and blood—yet it was a good resolve. It was far better than remaining where she was, in her then restless and anxious state, deprived of the presence of her Beloved. It was precisely the same as with the Prodigal Son, when he said, “I will arise, and go to my father.”

But if the resolve was good, the performance of it was still better. These, unfortunately, do not always go together. Too many persons there are, who resolve well, but do not perform well. They are like that son in the Parable, who when his father said to him, "Go, work in my vineyard;" replied, "I go, sir," and went not. On the other hand the repenting Prodigal not only said, "I will arise, and go;" but "he arose and came." Thus St. Paul gave his advice to the Corinthians, "Now therefore *perform* the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a *performance* also."

In like manner the Bride, as here represented, not only said, "I will rise now and go;" but she at once arose and went. "It is the sign of a sincere resolution, when it doth not put off or shift duty, but engageth the soul in a present undertaking of it;" as David said, "I made *haste* and *delayed not*, to keep thy commandments."—Ps : 119, v. 60.

"*And will go about the city. In the streets, and in the broadways, will I seek him whom my soul loveth.*"—The *city* with its places of concourse, its streets and broadways, is to be spiritually understood of the *Church*, with its public ordinances.

The antient Zion, which was called the "city of God," the "holy city;" and which contained the Temple, the house of God, where the sacrifices were offered, and where "prayer was wont to be made"—this city of Zion was but a type, or figure beforehand, of the Gospel-Church, which is expressly called the "New Jerusalem," the "city of the living God."

"The Church may be compared to a city, 1, for its *order and government*; it has watchmen and laws—2, for its *unity*; it is one commonwealth and incorporation.—Ephes. 4, v. 4, &c.—3, for its *privileges*; whereof all believers (who are the burgesses and fellow-citizens) are partakers.—Ephes. 2, v. 19;

and unto which all others, who are without, are as strangers and foreigners.”—*Durham.*

The Bride, then, going about the city, and seeking her Beloved in the streets and broadways thereof, will represent the anxious soul seeking Christ in the public ordinances of the Church ; in its congregational worship ; in its sacramental administrations.

Glorious things of thee are spoken,
Zion, city of our God ;
He whose word cannot be broken,
Form'd thee for His own abode :
On the Rock of Ages founded,
What can shake thy sure repose ?
With salvation's walls surrounded,
Thou may'st smile at all thy foes.

Saviour, if of Zion's city
I, through grace, a member am ;
Let the world deride, or pity,
I will glory in thy Name :
Fading is the worldling's pleasure,
All his boasted pomp and show ;
Solid joys, and lasting treasure,
None but Zion's children know.

Newton.

“*The watchmen of the city found me ; to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth ?*”—We may consider the Ministers of the Church as here referred to under the term “watchmen.” We find them so spoken of in other parts of Scripture ; as for instance Ezek. 3, v. 17, “Son of man, I have made thee a *watchman* unto the house of Israel ; therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me”—and again, Heb. 13, v. 17, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves ; for they *watch* for your souls, as they that must give account.”

The ministerial office, we may observe, is well described in this way, as resembling that of watchmen. “In the night

the watchmen go about the city, for the preservation of its peace and safety, to guide and assist the honest and quiet, as well as to be a check upon the unruly and disorderly."—*Durham.*

"To these watchmen the inquirer applies,—'Have ye seen the beloved of my soul?' Thus the distressed and tempted Christian should avail himself of the benefit of the divine institution of the Ministry, and seek religious counsel (when required) from those who are appointed to give it."

It is note-worthy, that very soon after her inquiring of the watchmen, the Bride finds the object of her search, the Beloved of her soul. This may teach us that God will honour his own ordained means, his own faithful Ministers; and that His people shall not be disappointed, who "seek the law at their mouth, for they are the messengers of the Lord of hosts."

Pour out thy Spirit from on high,
Lord ! thine appointed servants bless ;
Graces and gifts to each supply,
And clothe them with thy righteousness.

Wisdom, and zeal, and faith impart,
Firmness and meekness from above,
To bear thy people on their heart,
To love the souls whom thou dost love ;

To watch, and pray, and never faint,
By day and night strict guard to keep ;
To warn the sinner, cheer the saint,
Nourish thy lambs, and feed thy sheep ;

Then, when their work is finished here,
Let them in hope their charge resign ;
When the chief Shepherd shall appear,
O Lord ! may they and we be thine.

Montgomery.

III.
THE BELOVED FOUND.

It was but a little that I passed from them, when I found him whom my soul loveth : I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house.—Chap. 3, v. 4.

“*I found him whom my soul loveth.*”—The promise that they who seek shall find was now fulfilled in the Bride’s experience. She had sought her beloved with much patience, and under much discouragement. Many no doubt would have been led to give up the search as a hopeless one. But she persevered—like the woman of Canaan, whose great faith our Lord commended—and like her she met with her reward. So will it be too with all who imitate such examples.

“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with your whole heart ; and I will be found of you, saith the Lord.”—Jer. 29, v. 13.

Let it be especially observed that the secret of her perseverance, and of her success, was her intense and supreme love toward the object of her search. She gives him no name, but describes him merely as “him whom my soul loveth ;” which is repeated again and again with a touching simplicity. Her own soul was so full of the one idea, and of the one object, that she seems to have thought no name requisite ; but that all must know by that description whom she meant.

We have indeed the most powerful of all motives to action operating within us, when we can say with the Apostle Paul, “for the love of Christ constraineth us.”

“*I held him, and would not let him go,*” &c.—Having found her Beloved, she was afraid of losing him again ; and therefore she resolved to hold him fast, until they had together

reached her mother's house, where they might undisturbed enjoy each other's society.

We are here forcibly reminded of that mysterious passage in Old Testament history, the wrestling of Jacob with the Angel; a very similar expression being used by him, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me;" and Jacob had power with the angel, and prevailed.

In vain thou struggest to be free,
I never will unloose my hold ;
Art thou the Man that died for me ?
The secret of thy love unfold :
Wrestling I will not let thee go,
Till I thy Name, thy Nature know.
'Tis Love ! 'tis Love ! Thou diedst for me ?
I hear Thy whisper in my heart !
The morning breaks, the shadows flee ;
Pure universal love thou art !
To me, to all, Thy bowels move ;
Thy Nature, and Thy Name is Love !

C. Wesley.

Thus too the Bride, as represented in this Canticle, having found her Beloved, declared her determination to cleave closely to him : "I held him, and would not let him go."

In like manner, when the believing soul has again found Christ, after a temporary loss of His gracious presence, how will that presence be doubly valued and cherished ! How will the soul resolve to cleave henceforth closely to her Saviour ; and on no account, for no consideration whatever, to let him go again.

I will not let thee go ; Should I forsake my bliss ?
No, Lord, Thou'rt mine,
And I am thine,
Thee will I hold when all things else I miss :
Though dark and sad the night,
Joy cometh with Thy light,
O Thou my Sun ; should I forsake my bliss ?
I will not let Thee go.

German Hymn.

FIFTH CANTICLE.

THE BRIDEGROOM'S STATE-VISIT TO THE BRIDE,
AND HIS DESCRIPTION OF HER BEAUTY.

PLAN OF THE CANTICLE.

An opening question is asked (as we suppose by one or more of the Virgin companions of the Bride) as to what it is, which approaches from a distance ; supported on pillars, and surrounded with a cloud of incense. On their first catching sight of it, they naturally enquire, “ What is this, which cometh up from toward the wilderness ?”

Others of the Virgins, who by this time perceive it more distinctly, answer, “ Behold it is King Solomon's palanquin, or chariot-couch,” as the Hebrew word imports.

Others again, getting a still nearer and fuller view of it, describe the superb manner of its structure.

All this, as Bp. Percy remarks, seems to pass within the Bride's apartment, from which the Bride, being thus notified of the Bridegroom's approach, sends forth her Virgin attendants to meet him.

King Solomon enters, and being struck with the beauties of the Bride, “ he falls into a rapturous descent on them, and runs over her several features in an ecstasy of admiration, naturally expressed by bold and swelling figures.

FIFTH CANTICLE.

Ch. III, v. 6—11. Ch. IV, v. 1—7.

Authorised version and arrangement.

6. Who is this that cometh out of the (a) wilderness like (b) pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant ? 7. (c) Behold his bed, which is Solomon's ; three-score valiant men are about it, of the valiant of Israel. 8. They all hold swords, being expert in war : every man hath his sword upon his thigh because of fear in the night. 9. King Solomon made himself a (d) chariot of the wood of Lebanon. 10. He made the pillars thereof of silver, the bottom thereof of gold, the covering of it of purple, the midst thereof being paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem. 11. Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother (e) crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart. 1. Behold, thou art fair, my love ; behold, thou art fair ; thou hast (f) doves' eyes within thy locks : thy (g) hair is as a flock of goats that appear from (or that eat of) mount Gilead. 2. Thy (h) teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing ; whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them. 3. Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely ; thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks. 4. Thy (i) neck is like the tower of David builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men. 5. Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies. 6. Until the day break (or breathe), and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the (k) mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense. 7. Thou art all fair, my love ; there is no spot in thee.

*Revised Version arranged in the form of Dialogue, chiefly after
Bp. Percy and Dr. Mason Good.*

VIRGINS.

Who or what is this that cometh from toward the wilderness, as it were columns of smoke, perfumed with myrrh, and frankincense, and all the powders of the merchant ?

OTHER VIRGINS.

Behold it is the palanquin of Solomon ; threescore valiant men are about it, of the valiant of Israel. They are all begirt with swords,

being expert in war ; each one hath his sword upon his thigh against the peril of the night.

OTHER VIRGINS.

King Solomon hath made himself this bridal palanquin of the wood of Lebanon.

He hath made the pillars thereof of silver, its inside of gold, its hangings of purple :

The midst thereof is wrought, or paved, in needlework by the best beloved among the daughters of Jerusalem.

BRIDE.

Go forth, O daughters of Zion ! and behold King Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him on the day of his espousals, on the day of the gladness of his heart.

KING SOLOMON (ENTERING).

Behold, thou art fair, my love ; behold thou art fair.

Thine eyes are as the eyes of doves beneath thy locks ; now that thy veil is removed :

Thy hair is as a flock of goats that browse about Mount Gilead :

Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which come up from the washing, which are all of them twins, or pairs, and none hath lost its fellow :

Thy lips are like a brede of scarlet, and thy speech is charming :

As the flower of the pomegranate, so are thy cheeks beneath thy locks :

Thy neck is like the tower of David, built for an armoury ; where there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men :

Thy two breasts are like two young fawns that are twins, which feed among the lilies :

Until the day breathe, and the shades flee away, I will get me to this mountain of myrrh, and to this hill of frankincense.

Thou art all fair, my love ; there is no spot in thee.

PARAPHRASE.

VIRGINS.

Say, who and what is this, which cometh up
From toward the wilderness, circled with clouds
Of incense ; fum'd with myrrh, and frankincense,
And all the fragrant powders of the merchant ?

OTHER VIRGINS.

Lo ! 'tis the palanquin of Solomon !
In grand high state it comes ; with body-guard

Of six score valiant men, each with his sword
 Beside him girt, the flower of Israel's hosts—
 Right royal, and right bridal palanquin—
 Nought hath been spar'd of cost, or skill, to make it
 A gift all worthy of a King, and her
 His chosen Consort—Lebanon's best wood
 Its framework forms ; whilst on each side are rang'd
 Pillars of silver, drap'd with purple hangings—
 Its cushion'd floor with cloth of gold is laid,
 Wrought all about with curious needle-work,
 Love's tribute to their King from Sion's daughters.

BRIDE.

Go forth, ye daughters of Jerusalem !
 Go forth, and see King Solomon the crown
 Still wearing, which his mother crown'd him with,
 On that bright day, the day of his espousals,
 When gladness fill'd his heart to over-flowing.

KING SOLOMON (ENTERING).

Oh ! fair art thou, my love ! oh ! fair art thou !
 Thine eyes are dove-like ; bright they shine, yet tender,
 'Neath thy loose flowing locks, thine only veil—
 So soft and glossy hangs thy waving hair,
 It looks as when a flock of goats doth browse
 On Gilead's mountain-side—Thy teeth, so white,
 And even set, are as the sheep fresh shorn,
 Which from the washing-stream go up in pairs,
 All twins, and each with other truly match'd,
 None faulty found among them—Delicate lines,
 And finely curv'd, of scarlet are thy lips,
 Whence flows a voice and speech of winning sweetness.
 On thy soft cheek, shaded by falling tresses,
 Blossoms the pomegranate—Thy neck doth rise
 In tapering symmetry ; like David's tower,

Of just proportions, and hung round with shields,
Trophies and spoils of war—Thy two young breasts
As twin fawns are, which feed among the lilies.

Oh ! here shall be my stay, my sweet abode—
This mount of myrrh, this hill of frankincense—
E'en till night's shadows flee at break of day,
Before the freshly breathing morn—My love !
All fair art thou—all fair—no spot in thee !

FIFTH CANTICLE.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

(a) *From toward the wilderness.* This is to be taken, according to Percy and Good, as meaning from the direction of the wilderness, *i. e.*, from that part of the royal gardens, or pleasure grounds, which lay toward the wilderness.

(b) *Columns of smoke, perfumed with myrrh, &c.* “The use of perfumes at eastern marriages is common ; and upon great occasions very profuse. Not only are the garments scented, till (in the Psalmist’s language) they ‘smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia ;’ but it is customary to carry in the marriage procession vessels filled with perfumes ; and even the air around is sometimes rendered fragrant by the burning of aromatics in the windows of all the houses in the streets, through which the procession has to pass. In the present instance so liberally were these perfumes burnt, that at a distance pillars or columns of smoke arose from them.”

“The Hebrew word for *columns* means strictly *palm trees* ; which from their height and straitness were often used for that purpose ; and a pillar or column of smoke, in a calm clear atmosphere, strongly resembles the palm-tree—rising

very high, and then bending downwards. ‘*Columnæ, ad formam palmae assurgentæ.*’—*Buxtorf. Williams.*

Dr. Percy suggests that these strong perfumed fumigations might also have had the effect, and have been used for the purpose, of driving away the insects, whose bite is so troublesome in those hot countries.

(c) *Behold it is the palanquin of Solomon.* The word, here translated “bed” in the common version, is supposed to have been a bridal palanquin, which Solomon had expressly provided as a present for his Bride.

Dr. Good observes, “The mode of travelling, or of taking the air, in a couch, litter, or vehicle of this name, supported upon the shoulders of slaves or servants, is extremely common all over the east at the present day ; and is unquestionably of immemorial date. These palanquins are often of most elegant and superb manufacture, as well as most voluptuously soft and easy. Of this description was the couch or palanquin before us. There can be no doubt that it was a vehicle built in celebration of the royal nuptials ; and of its magnificence we may furnish some idea from the present description of it. Escorted by a chosen band of warriors, and veiled in this rich and fragrant vehicle, in all the style of oriental splendour, the enamoured monarch pays a visit to the beloved of his bosom.”

(d) *This bridal palanquin of the wood of Lebanon, &c.* “A Turkish coach (says Lady Mary Montagu in her Letters) is made of wooden lattices, painted and gilded :—Solomon’s carriage was made of the *wood* of Lebanon, its pillars of silver. The inside of the Turkish coach was painted with baskets of flowers and nosegays, intermixed with short poetical mottoes :—the midst of Solomon’s was ‘paved with love’ by the skilful daughters of Jerusalem ; i. e., with a rich beautiful sort of tapestry, curiously wrought with the needle ; where flowers, of different kinds and colours, were intermixed with short sentences expressing the power of love, and the warmth of that passion, which a young bride-

groom entertains for a fair and virtuous bride. Here was an ample field for the daughters of Jerusalem to display their skill in needle-work. See Judges 5, v. 30. Prov. 31, v. 22—24.”—*Francis.*

(e) *Wherewith his mother crowned him on the day of his espousals.* It was customary among the Greeks and Romans, as also among the Hebrews, and other orientals, to put crowns or chaplets on the heads of newly married persons—composed sometimes merely of leaves or flowers; sometimes of more costly materials, as silver or gold, according to the rank and wealth of the parties.

(f) *Thine eyes are as the eyes of doves, &c.* With regard to the description here given of the various beauties of the Bride, Mr. Fry has the following judicious remark, “It may be necessary to observe that several of the following comparisons (as illustrations of female beauty), though they may appear to us obscure or inapt, might, nevertheless, in the times and circumstances when these poems were written, have been most appropriate and elegant.”

(g) *Thy hair is as a flock of goats.* The hair of the eastern goats is of the most delicate silky softness, to which Bochart considers the comparison here to refer. The colour of the goats’ hair is generally of a dark brown.

Parkhurst however very justly observes that the bride’s hair is compared, not merely to the long glossy hair of the eastern goats, but to a *flock* of goats browsing on Mount Gilead; in allusion to the numerous ringlets, or tresses, into which the hair was broken; and which adorned the head of the bride; as the goats did the sides and precipices of Mount Gilead.

(h) *Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep, &c.* The images here employed are intended, as Bp. Percy remarks, to denote that the Bride’s teeth were even—white—exactly paired or matched—and the whole set entire and unbroken.

(i) *Thy neck is like the tower of David, &c.* The tower of David here alluded to was, no doubt, from its situation on

Mount Zion ; from the beauty of its proportions, as well as from the whiteness and smoothness of the stone, or marble, whereof it was composed ; an object of general admiration—and therefore the poet might well compare with it the neck of the bride ; and the more so as her neck would probably be adorned with jewels, even as the tower of David was with arms and shields of the mighty.

(k) *This mountain of myrrh, &c.* “ Myrrh and frankincense were among the most valued perfumes of the east : the Bridegroom therefore concludes his compliments on the Bride’s person, by comparing her to an entire heap of those precious essences.”—*Percy.*

FIFTH CANTICLE.

PRACTICAL COMMENTS.

This Canticle naturally divides itself into two parts—the Bridegroom’s State-visit to the Bride—and the Bride found in the perfection of beauty.

I.

THE BRIDEGROOM’S STATE-VISIT TO THE BRIDE.

Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the powders of the merchant ? Behold his bed (palanquin), which is Solomon’s ; three-score valiant men are about it, of the valiant of Israel. They all hold swords, being expert in war ; every man hath his sword upon his thigh because of fear in the night. King Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon. He made the pillars thereof of silver, and the bottom thereof of gold, the covering of purple, the midst therof being paved with love—Go forth, O ye daughters of

Zion, and behold King Solomon with the crown, wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart.—Chap. 3, v. 6—11.

This has been variously viewed and expounded. Two or three different opinions are subjoined.

1. Some, for instance, have applied it to the time of Christ's *first coming*, when in the greatness of his love he came to redeem the world. "By this chariot," says Durham, "is signified the work of redemption, whereby Christ communicates his love to sinners, and carries them through; therefore it is said to be a chariot 'paved with love.'"

2. Some have applied it to the time of *conversion*. "Should I be asked," says Williams, "which is the day of the *gladness of the Redeemer's heart*? I would answer, that day in which his people become related to him by their covenant engagements, and united with him by living faith; which may be called the day of their espousals. Then they become his jewels—his joy—his crown."

3. Some have applied it to the time of the *Christian's departure* out of this world, at the hour of death, when the Lord comes (as it were) to take his people home; to receive them to himself, that where he is they may be also. In prospect of this, St. Paul could speak of himself as "having a desire to depart, and be with Christ"; "willing rather to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord."

4. But the best way of interpreting and applying the allegory seems to be that, which explains it as referring to the *second coming* of Christ; "when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe in that day." This may very properly be regarded as the heavenly Bridegroom's *state-visit* to his Bride, the Church; when he will find her in the perfection of beauty, ready to receive him. It is to the celebration of this event, that St. John in the

Apocalypse refers, when he says that he heard the voice of a great multitude, saying, “ Alleluiah : for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad, and rejoice, and give honour to him ; for the *marriage* of the Lamb is come, and his *wife* hath made herself *ready*.”

This is indeed the great object of Christ’s second coming —not to suffer, but to reign ; not to endure the Cross, but to wear the Crown. He will come, in short, the second time, as a Bridegroom to claim his perfected Bride, the Church.

He left His throne above,
His glory laid aside,
Came down on wings of love,
And wept, and bled, and died :
The pangs He bore what tongue can tell,
To save our souls from death and hell !

He soon again will come,
(His chariot will not stay),
To take His children home
To realms of endless day ;
We there shall see him face to face,
And sing the triumphs of His grace.

The Rev. W. Burgh, Author of “Lectures on the Second Advent,” has the following very just remarks on this point : “The emblem of *marriage* is frequently used in the Scriptures to represent the *Second Advent* of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus in Matt. 25, in the Parable of the Ten Virgins, we read (v. 1), “ Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto Ten Virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the Bridegroom ; and (v. 6) at midnight there was a cry made, behold, the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him.”

“There are several reasons, which combine to give a peculiar suitability to this emblem to represent the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in his kingdom. The *marriage* solemnity is the hour of the Bridegroom’s joy and felicity ; and

it also conveys the idea of glory. Thus in Psalm 19, when the Psalmist would fix upon an emblem to describe the splendour and glory of the Sun in the firmament, he says, “which is as a *bridegroom* coming out of his chamber.” Hence all nations, and especially the eastern, and the Jews of old, were in the habit of using ornaments and splendid attire on the occasion of solemnizing their marriages. Wherefore a marriage feast and ceremony may be considered a fit emblem of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, being the time of his chief glory, and highest joy, as the Saviour and Head of the Church.”

Again it may be observed—if we look to the *manner*, as well as to the *object* of Christ’s second coming, we shall see that it equally favours our view as to the application of this part of the Canticle.

For in what *manner* is Christ represented in Scripture as about to come the second time—not as at first in “great humility,” but in his “glorious majesty”—not unobserved and unknown, but with great pomp and outward show—just as in this Canticle the Bridegroom-King is described as coming in high state.

Christ will come for instance :—

1. With *clouds*—“Behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him.”
2. With *glory*—“And they shall see him coming with power and great glory.”
3. With *angel hosts*—“And all his holy angels with him”—“When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.”

Thus, whether we consider the object of His coming, or the manner of it, we may not improperly apply the Canticle in this way ; and conclude that the coming of King Solomon,

the royal Bridegroom, in great state, in his splendid chariot, encircled with clouds of incense, and accompanied with a host of chosen warriors, may well be taken as an allegorical representation of the second coming of Christ.

Lo ! he comes with clouds descending,
Once for favour'd sinners slain ;
Thousand, thousand, saints attending
Swell the triumph of his train ;
Hallelujah ! God appears on earth to reign.

The chariot ! the chariot ! its wheels roll in fire,
As the Lord cometh down in the pomp of his ire ;
Self-moving it drives on its pathway of cloud,
And the heav'ns with the burden of Godhead are baw'd.

The glory ! the glory ! around him are pour'd
The myriads of angels that wait on the Lord ;
And the glorified saints, and the martyrs are there,
And all who the palm-wreaths of victory wear.

Milman.

Ye saints, rejoice in hope
Of that great day, unknown,
When you shall be caught up
To meet before his throne ;
Call'd to partake the marriage feast,
And lean on your Immanuel's breast.

Wesley.

II.

THE BRIDE FOUND IN THE PERFECTION OF BEAUTY.

Behold, thou art fair, my love ; behold thou art fair : Thou art all fair, my love : there is no spot in thee.—Ch. 4, v. 1, &c.

The descriptions, which are given in this Canticle, of the Bride's perfect beauty, in face and form, are of course to be taken as figurative descriptions of that spiritual beauty, which belongs to the true Church of Christ, and to every

true Christian believer. It is (to use the language of Scripture) the “beauty of holiness.” It consists in freedom from sin, which is the real “spot and blemish,” the real deformity. It is, in fact, the restoration of that divine image, which was lost by the fall of Adam.

This is what is commonly called our “sanctification”—a work begun and carried on here by the Holy Ghost, of whom it is expressly declared that He “sanctifieth all the elect people of God.”

This work, however, though continually progressing, is not made perfect in this present life; but will be perfected in the life to come, in the resurrection-life. The Bride of Christ, his Church, will then indeed be found in the perfection of beauty, both in body and soul. She will then be “all fair,” with “no spot” in her.

It was to redeem and sanctify such a Church to himself that Christ came, and consented to die a sacrifice for sin; “Who gave himself for us (says the Apostle Paul) that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.” “Even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it, with the washing of water, by the word, that he might present it unto himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.”

This was the great purpose of the Redeemer’s first coming, the great end for which he suffered and died. This was the “joy set before him;” the “day of the gladness of his heart;” to which he looked forward in hope, whilst he was yet upon earth; to which he still looks forward in hope, now that he is in heaven; and for the fulfilment of which he will come again the *second* time.

To this same “blessed hope” the Bride herself also looks forward, and she even now rejoices in it, “looking for that

blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the Great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." "For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body." "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

Mr. Burgh remarks, "Since then Christ's glory, as well as the Church's glory, is deferred to the day of his second coming, the union of Christ with his Church will then for the first time be fully exhibited. She will then share in his crown, his throne, his kingdom; and therefore the time of this joint-triumph, of this united glory, is very fitly likened to a marriage-time; as the Church herself is likened to a Bride."

"The Church is represented to us in Scripture as having naturally no beauty of her own, but as being defiled and deformed, and in all respects the reverse of what the Lord would seek to unite himself to; but he is represented likewise as making the Bride meet for himself. All her qualifications, all her meetness, all her beauty is derived from him. And this is a further reason why the symbol of marriage may be applied with peculiar propriety to the second coming of Christ; forasmuch as it is the day of the Church's perfection, as well as of the revelation of Christ's mediatorial glory."

The following lines from the closing pages of Pollock's "Course of Time," being very appropriate to the subject of this Canticle, as well as very beautiful in themselves, will not be unacceptable to the reader :

·Thus spake the Omnipotent, Incarnate God :
And waited not the homage of the crowns
Already thrown before him ; nor the loud
Amen of universal, holy, praise ;
But turn'd the living chariot of fire,

And swifter now (as joyful to declare
This day's proceedings in his Father's court,
And to present the number of his sons
Before the Throne,) ascended up to heaven.
And all his saints, and all his angel-bands,
As glorious they on high ascended, sung
Glory to God and to the Lamb ! they sung,
' Messiah fairer than the sons of men,
And altogether lovely ! grace is pour'd
Into thy lips, above all measure pour'd ;
And therefore God hath bless'd thee evermore.
Gird, gird, thy sword upon thy thigh, O Thou
Most mighty ; with thy glory ride ; with all
Thy majesty, ride prosperously ; because
Of meekness, truth, and righteousness. Thy throne
O God ! for ever and for ever stands ;
The sceptre of thy kingdom still is right ;
Therefore hath God, thy God, anointed thee,
With oil of gladness, and perfumes of myrrh,
Out of the ivory palaces, above
Thy fellows—crown'd thee Prince of endless peace !'

Thus sung they God their Saviour : and themselves
Prepar'd complete to enter now with Christ,
Their living Head, into the Holy Place.
Behold ! the daughter of the King, the Bride,
All glorious within, the Bride adorn'd,
Comely in broidery of gold ! behold,
She comes, apparell'd royally, in robes
Of perfect righteousness ; fair as the sun ;
With all her virgins, her companions fair ;
Into the Palace of the King she comes,
She comes to dwell for evermore ! Awake,
Eternal harps ! awake, awake, and sing !—
The Lord, the Lord, Our God Almighty, reigns !

SIXTH CANTICLE.

THE BRIDE COMPARED TO A LOVELY GARDEN OR PARADISE.

PLAN OF THE CANTICLE.

The style of this Canticle is highly figurative and poetical. The Bridegroom begins by inviting his Spouse to consider the sweet security, which she may enjoy under his protection and care ; as contrasted with the situation of difficulty and danger, which he describes. “This he does,” observes Bp. Percy, “according to the Eastern manner, in the way of parable or figure, by supposing her placed on the tops of mountains infested by wild beasts ; whence he invites her to his arms as to a place of safety, and gives her to understand that, since he is her guardian, she may look down in security amidst any dangers, of which she was apprehensive.”

The Bridegroom then breaks forth, in very beautiful language, into the praises of his Bride—comparing her to an “inclosed garden,” to a “spring shut up,” to a “fountain sealed ;” terms expressive of her purity and perfection.

“She, catching up the metaphor, wishes that the garden (for which he has expressed such fondness) might be so breathed upon by kindly gales as to produce whatever might contribute to his delight.”

The Bridegroom, at the close of the Canticle, declares his entire happiness in the possession of his Bride ; and invites his friends to sympathize with him on the happy occasion, to rejoice with him in his joy.

SIXTH CANTICLE.

*Ch. IV, v. 8—16. Ch. V, v. 1.**Authorised version and arrangement.*

8. Come with me from (a) Lebanon, my Spouse, with me from Lebanon : look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards. 9. Thou hast ravished my heart, my Sister, my Spouse ! thou hast ravished my heart with one (b) of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck. 10. How fair is thy love, my Sister, my Spouse ! how much better is thy love than wine ! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices ! Thy (c) lips, O my Spouse, drop as the honeycomb : honey and milk are under thy tongue ; and the (d) smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon. 12. A garden (e) inclosed is my Sister, my Spouse ; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. 13. Thy (f) plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits ; camphire, with spikenard. 14. Spikenard and saffron ; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense ; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices : 15. A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, (g) streams from Lebanon. 16. (h) Awake, O (i) north wind ; and come, O south ; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits. 1. I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse : I have gathered my myrrh with my spice ; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey ; I have drunk my wine with my milk : eat (l) O friends ; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.

*Revised Version arranged in the form of Dialogue, chiefly after
Ep. Percy and Dr. Mason Good.*

BRIDEGROOM.

Come to me from Lebanon, my Spouse ; come to me from Lebanon.
Look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon ;
from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards.

Thou hast ravished my heart, my Sister, my Spouse ; thou hast
ravished my heart with one glance of thine eyes, with one charming
turn of thy neck.

How sweet is thy love, my Sister, my Spouse ! how much better is
thy love than wine ; and the smell of thy perfumes beyond all spices !

Thy lips, O my Spouse, drop as the honeycomb ; honey and milk are under thy tongue ; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.

A garden inclosed is my Sister, my Spouse ; a spring shut up ; a fountain sealed.

Thy productions are a paradise of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits ; camphire and spikenard ;

Spikenard and saffron ; calamus and cinnamon ; with all trees of frankincense, myrrh, and aloes : together with all the chief spices.

A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.

BRIDE.

Awake, O North wind ; and come, O South ; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Then let my Beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.

BRIDEGROOM.

I am come into my garden, my Sister, my Spouse ; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice ; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey ; I have drank of my wine with my milk.

Eat, O friends, drink, yea drink abundantly, O Beloved.

PARAPHRASE.

BRIDE.

O come to me, my Spouse, from Lebanon ;
 From Lebanon's wild forests come to me ;
 From Amana's and Shenir's mountain-tops,
 And Hermon's heights, those haunts of savage nature,
 Where dens of lions are and leopards' lairs,
 O come, find sweet security with me—
 My Spouse ! my Sister ! thou my captur'd heart,
 With one resistless glance of thy bright eye,
 With one enchanting turn of thy fair neck,
 Hast taken, as by force, spite of myself—
 My Spouse ! my Sister ! oh ! how good thy love,
 Better than costliest wine ! thy perfumes too,
 How rich the fragrance which they fling around,
 More than of all choice spices ! O my Spouse !
 Thy lips drop sweetness like the honeycomb—

Yea, milk and honey from thy tongue do flow
 In soft and sweet discourse—thy garments smell
 All redolent of cedar'd Lebanon—
 My Spouse ! my Sister ! an inclosed Garden,
 A Spring shut up, a Fountain seal'd art thou—
 A Paradise of all choice trees and fruits,
 Of pomegranates, of camphire, and of spikenard ;
 Of saffron, calamus, and cinnamon,
 Aloes, and myrrh—all trees of frankincense,
 All choice spice-bearing shrubs—a Paradise,
 Well-water'd everywhere by living springs,
 Perennial fountains, streams from Lebanon.

BRIDE.

Awake, O North Wind ; come, O South ; and blow
 Fresh o'er my garden, that its spicey stores,
 More freely given, may fill the balmy air—
 Then let my lov'd one come into his garden,
 Enjoy its rest, and eat its pleasant fruits.

BRIDEGROOM.

Into my garden I'm come, my Sister-Spouse !
 I've gather'd of its pleasant fruits, my myrrh,
 My spice—I've eaten with delighted taste
 My honeycomb's sweet treasures—and I've drank
 My wine, my milk, delicious draughts—O friends,
 Rejoice with me in this my joy ; eat, drink :
 Yea, drink abundantly ; for 'tis but meet
 That with one heart and mind, one common gladness,
 All should rejoice on this most happy day.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

(a) *Come to me from Lebanon, &c.* This is not to be taken literally, but as a metaphorical mode of denoting some situation of danger. With this view certain mountains are mentioned—such as Lebanon, Amana, Shenir, and Hermon—which were well known to be dangerous; the haunts of wild beasts, of lions and leopards.

The Bridegroom, who here for the first time calls the Bride his “Spouse,” and his “Sister,” wishes to impress her mind with a sense of her perfect security with him. Whatever might have been the perils which once threatened her, or the hardships she had once to endure—for at one time she had been exposed to the envy and malice of her “mother’s children,” who had cast her out; and her own fears had made her like a dove hiding in the clefts of the rock—yet now she had a sure and safe refuge open to her, and might rest perfectly secure in the love and care of her royal husband, King Solomon.

(b) *With one glance of thine eyes.* The object of the bridegroom-poet was to exalt as highly as possible the charms of his Bride; and therefore he here declares that even one glance from her had been sufficient to conquer him, and lead him captive. This is quite in accordance with the usual oriental style, existing to the present day. For (as Dr. Good has observed) in a modern Persian love-poem, quoted by Sir W. Jones, the writer speaks of “her, who has stolen the heart of Mejnun with a single glance.”

(c) *Thy lips drop as the honeycomb; honey and milk are under thy tongue.* The comparison of the Bride’s sweet and pleasant speech to the honeycomb agrees with Prov. 16, v. 24, “Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, ‘sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.’” We find also the same

expression “milk and honey” similarly employed by classical authors. Pindar compares his odes to honey mixed with milk. And in Plautus “your words are honey and milk.” —*Gill.*

(d) *The smell of thy garments is as the smell of Lebanon.* Among eastern nations it was customary to perfume their wardrobes with cedar, cassia, or other fragrant woods. Thus Ps : 45, v. 8, “All thy garments smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces;” or as it might be better translated “ivory wardrobes.”

(e) *A garden inclosed is my Sister, my Spouse ; a spring shut up ; a fountain sealed.* These were recognised terms among the Hebrews to denote, not only a state of virginity before marriage, but also of fidelity after marriage, whereby the Spouse was ever kept sacred for her husband. This is referred to Prov. 5, v. 8, &c., “Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. Let them be only thine own, and not a stranger’s with thee. Let thy fountain be blessed ; and rejoice with the wife of thy youth.”

Josephus tells us that Solomon took great delight in his gardens and fountains ; and the following extract from Maundrell’s Travels, bearing upon this point, will be read with interest ; “The first place, which we directed our course to, were those famous fountains, pools, and gardens, which were the delight of Solomon, alluded to Eccles. 2, v. 5—6, “I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits. I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees.” About the distance of one hundred and forty paces from these pools is the Fountain, from which they principally derive their waters. This the friars told us was the SEALED FOUNTAIN to which the holy Spouse is compared Cant. 4, v. 12,—and they pretend a tradition that King Solomon *shut up these springs*, and kept the door of them *sealed* with his signet, to preserve the waters for his own drinking, in their natural freshness and

purity. Nor was it difficult thus to secure them, they rising under ground, and having no avenue to them but a little hole, like the mouth of a narrow well. These waters wind along through two rooms cut out of the solid rock, which are arched over with stone arches, very antient, perhaps the work of Solomon's own times. Below the pool there runs down a narrow rocky valley, inclosed on both sides with high mountains; this, they told us, was the **INCLOSED GARDEN** alluded to in the same Song."

"This fountain is a large and regularly vaulted subterranean chamber, into which the waters gathered from the surrounding country well up. The entrance is by a narrow hole like the mouth of a small well, and which is shut in with a huge stone. Dr. Barclay regards it as in all probability the work of Solomon; and is of opinion that this copious and perennial stream, so curiously hidden—itself unseen, and yet the source of such perpetual blessing—is the very original from which Solomon drew his beautiful idea which represents the Church, the Spouse of the heavenly Bridegroom, as a 'spring shut up, a fountain sealed.'"—*Buchanan.*

(f) *Thy productions or plants, &c.* The Bridegroom, having in the former sentence called the Bride an *inclosed garden*, here carries on the metaphor, and compares her virtues and accomplishments to all the choicest productions of an eastern orchard or paradise.

(g) *Streams from Lebanon.* The great height and extent of Lebanon make it to be the source of numerous streams, which, collecting at its base, form themselves into large rivers. Dr. Good remarks, "In Maundrell's Travels we meet with the following description, which has seldom been omitted by commentators in their illustrations of this beautiful passage. 'There is a very deep rupture in the side of Lebanon running directly up into the mountain. It is on both sides exceedingly steep and high, clothed with fragrant shrubs from top to bottom, and everywhere refreshed with fountains falling

down from the rocks in pleasant cascades. The streams all uniting at the bottom, form a full and rapid torrent, whose agreeable murmuring is heard all over the place, and adds no small pleasure to it."

(h) *Awake, &c.* This expression is of frequent occurrence in the figurative language of Scripture. Thus Judges 5, v. 12, "Awake, awake, Deborah; awake, awake, utter a song." Psalm 57, v. 8, "Awake, O my glory; awake, lute and harp." Isaiah 51, v. 9, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord."

(i) *Awake, O North wind; and come, O South.* Some question has arisen as to the propriety of invoking both the North and the South wind to blow. Of course, however, it is not meant that they should blow together, but alternately; each in its due season, and each for the important uses to which it is adapted.

"The North wind is of use to close the pores of the trees, and to shut up their exhalations, that they may not spend themselves too much; and the South wind, coming in its set time, relaxes them again, making the aromatic gums to drop freely, and to give forth their odours. These are the only two desirable winds in those countries."—See *Patrick, Le Clerc, &c.*

(l) *Eat, O friends; yea, drink abundantly, O Beloved.* This may be an invitation to the friends of the Bride and Bridegroom to partake of the literal feast then prepared—or it may be merely a metaphorical mode of inviting them to rejoice in sympathy with the married pair, whose mutual happiness was so great.

It will not perhaps be out of place here, nor unacceptable to the reader, to quote Milton's description of the Garden of Eden:—

" In this pleasant soil
His far more pleasant garden God ordained;
Out of the fertile ground he caused to grow
All trees of noblest kind, for sight, smell, taste;
And all amid them stood the Tree of Life,

High eminent, blooming ambrosial fruit
Of vegetable gold ; and next to life
Our death, the tree of knowledge, grew fast by ;
Knowledge of good bought dear by knowing ill.
Southward through Eden went a river large,
Nor changed his course, but thro' the shaggy hill
Pass'd underneath ingulfed ; for God had thrown
That mountain as his garden-mould, high raised
Upon the rapid current ; which thro' veins
Of porous earth with kindly thirst updrawn,
Rose a fresh fountain, and with many a rill
Watered the garden ; thence united fell
Down the steep glades, and met the nether flood ;
Which from his darksome passage now appears,
And now divided into four main streams,
Runs diverse, wandering many a famous realm
And country, whereof here needs no account :
But rather to tell how, if art could tell,
How from that sapphire fount the crisped brooks,
Rolling on orient pearl and sands of gold,
With mazy error, under pendant shades,
Ran nectar, visiting each plant, and fed
Flowers worthy of Paradise ; which not nice Art
In beds and curious knots, but Nature boon
Poured forth profuse on hill, and dale, and plain ;
Both where the morning sun first warmly smote
The open field, and where the unpierced shade
Imbrowned the noontide bowers : thus was this place
A happy rural seat of various view ;
Groves whose rich trees wept odorous gums and balm ;
Others whose fruit, burnished with golden rind,
Hung amiable, Hesperian fables true,
If true, here only, and of delicious taste :
Betwixt them lawns, or level downs, and flocks
Grazing the tender herb, were interposed ;
Or palmy hillock, or the flowery lap
Of some irriguous valley spread her store,
Flowers of all hue, and without thorn the rose :
Another side, umbrageous grots, and caves
Of cool recess, o'er which the mantling vine
Lays forth her purple grape, and gently creeps
Luxuriant ; meanwhile murmuring waters fall
Down the slope hills, dispersed, or in a lake,

That to the fringed bank with myrtle crowned
Her crystal mirror holds, unite their streams."

Paradise Lost, Book 4, v. 214, &c.

SIXTH CANTICLE.

PRACTICAL COMMENTS.

I.

THE WILD MOUNTAIN-TOPS AND LIONS' DENS.

Come to me from Lebanon, my sister, my spouse ; come to me from Lebanon. Look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon ; from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards.—Chap. 4, v. 8, &c.

Here is an invitation, the general import of which is sufficiently clear, viz., that the Spouse should come to the arms of her Beloved, as a place of refuge and of perfect security.

The scenery referred to is marked by wildness and danger—the tops of mountains, which were well known as the haunts of savage beasts, full of lions' dens and leopards' lairs. And there are scenes, we may remark, answering thereto, both in the Church's history, and in the experience of each individual believer.

Such wild scenery, for instance, might well be taken to represent those *persecutions*, to which the Church has from time to time been exposed—as also those *afflictions and trials*, of various kinds, to which each individual soul is subject.

It was not without occasion that David said, “my soul is

among *lions*"—or that Paul said, "I have fought with *beasts* at Ephesus," "and I was delivered out of the mouth of the *lion*"—or that Peter said, "be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring *lion*, walketh about seeking whom he may devour."

David especially was one, whose experience (as described in many of his own psalms) corresponded exactly to what would be the experience of a traveller, passing over these wild and dangerous mountain-tops, named by Solomon as "the lions' dens, the mountains of leopards."

David suffered in nearly all ways, and from nearly all causes; public and private; internal and external; spiritual and temporal. And in this respect he was a remarkable type, not only of Christ himself, the "man of sorrows;" but also of the members of Christ; the individual members of his body, the Church. They too are exposed, more or less, to persecutions, afflictions, and trials; to difficulties, dangers, and distresses. They are as pilgrims travelling thro' this world to a better country, that is, a heavenly—and they cannot attain to their journey's end without passing over (so to speak) these mountain-tops—so cold and cheerless, so wild and dangerous—of Lebanon, Amana, Shenir, and Hermon.

"Dangers of every shape and name
Attend the followers of the Lamb."

Cowper.

But from all such dangers and trials there is a refuge opened, and the Spouse is invited to flee to it. "Come to me," says the Bridegroom, "from Lebanon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards—come to me, and thou shalt be safe; come to me, and thou shalt find rest."

Do we not here recognise the voice of One, who "in the days of his flesh" said, and in his Gospel still repeats it, "Come unto me all that labour and are heavy-laden, and I

will give you rest"—“Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid”—“In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in me ye shall have peace.”

Such are the invitations and promises of an almighty and almerciful Saviour. It is the Bridegroom calling to his Spouse, the Church ; and bidding her seek peace and safety in her Saviour’s bosom amid all the dangers and distresses of life. And to every one who hears and obeys the call ; to every one who comes to Christ, and trusts in him, it may be said, “Trust, and be not afraid”—“The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”

Jesu ! lover of my soul !
 Let me to thy bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll,
 While the tempest still is high.

Other refuge have I none ;
 Hangs my helpless soul on Thee ;
Leave, oh ! leave me not alone,
 Still support and comfort me !

C. Wesley.

PSALM 46.

God is our Refuge, tried and proved,
 Amid a stormy world ;
We will not fear though earth be moved,
 And hills in ocean hurled.

The waves may roar, the mountains shake,
 Our comforts shall not cease ;
The Lord his saints will not forsake,
 The Lord will give us peace.

When earth and hell against us came,
 He spake, and quelled their powers ;
The Lord of hosts is still the same,
 The God of grace is ours.

Lyte.

PSALM 91.

There is a safe and secret place
 Beneath the wings divine,
 Reserved for all the heirs of grace ;
 O be that refuge mine !

The least and feeblest there may bide,
 Uninjured and unawed ;
 While thousands fall on every side,
 He rests secure in God.

The angels watch him on his way,
 And aid with friendly arm ;
 And Satan, roaring for his prey,
 May hate, but cannot harm.

A hand almighty to defend,
 An ear for every call,
 An honoured life, a peaceful end,
 And Heaven to crown it all !

Lyte.

II.

THE GARDEN INCLOSED.

A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse ; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Thy productions are a paradise of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits ; camphire and spikenard ; spikenard and saffron ; calamus and cinnamon ; with all trees of frankincense, myrrh, and aloes ; together with all the chief spices. A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.—Chap. 4, v. 12—15.

The Church is here compared to a beautiful garden or Paradise. And as it is in this respect with the Church at large, so is it with each individual believing soul—it is as a garden to the Lord.

The comparison holds good in several points; as for instance in the following—

1. A garden is a plot of ground separated from the com-

mon or waste, and set apart for a particular purpose to the Owner.

So the Church is separated and set apart from the world, which is as a waste or wilderness, and of which Christ said to his disciples, “Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world”—“but I have chosen you *out of the world*.”

We are a garden wall'd around,
Chosen and made peculiar ground ;
A little spot inclosed by grace
Out of the world's wide wilderness.

Watts.

2. A garden is for the pleasure and recreation of the Owner, as well as for his profit—laid out for ornament, as well as for use—and therefore stocked, not only with fruit-trees, and vegetable productions ; but also with flowers of loveliest form and tint, and of sweetest fragrance.

So the Church, whilst it is for the service of Christ, is also for his pleasure—to be a delight to him. The *good works* of Christian believers are as *fruits*, useful to men ; their *virtues and graces* are as *flowers*. Their humility, their gentleness, their patience, their charity—these and the like are as flowers, which adorn a Christian profession, and are well-pleasing and acceptable to Christ as the odour of a sweet smell.

3. A garden is a piece of ground highly cultivated and well cared for. Nothing grows in it spontaneously, but only what is planted or sown by hand. Fountains and streams of water, affording ample means of irrigation, are provided. In short no means are wanting, which can promote its fruitfulness, or add to its beauty.

So the Church, in like manner, is peculiarly the object of divine culture and care. Its trees, are not the growth of nature, but of grace—“trees of righteousness, the planting of

the Lord"—as Christ himself says, "every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." Meanwhile this spiritual garden, the Church, is supplied with the living waters of the Spirit, conducted through a variety of channels, or means of grace, and carrying life and health and fertility unto every part.

In these respects therefore, among others, the Church of Christ may well be compared to a garden—a "garden inclosed—a garden of pleasant plants and fruits, with all trees of frankincense, and with all the chief spices."

The original type of this was no doubt the garden of Eden ; the Paradise, into which God put the man whom he had made, the first Adam. "And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden ; and out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food. And a river went out of Eden to water the garden." We are expressly told that the Lord himself was wont to come into this garden, for he had a delight therein, to hold converse with our first Parents—"And they heard the voice of the Lord God, as he walked in the garden in the cool of the day."

We know, alas ! the sad story of the Fall—how Paradise was lost—through the sin of the first Adam. But, blessed be God ! we know also how another and a better Paradise has been gained through the righteousness of the second Adam. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."—Rom. 5, v. 19—20. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."—Rev. 2, v. 7.

His church as a fair garden stands,
Which walls of love inclose ;
Each tree is planted by his hands,
And by his blessing grows.

Believing hearts are gardens too ;
For grace has sown its seeds,
Where once by nature nothing grew
But thorns and worthless weeds.

Newton.

III.

THE BRIDEGROOM INVITED INTO HIS GARDEN.

The Spouse invites her Lord to come into his garden ; and she shows her earnest desire to please him by calling upon the winds—the North and the South, each in its season—to blow upon this garden ; that its spice-bearing trees, and fragrant shrubs, may shed forth their fragrance more abundantly.

Something very similar to this takes place with every renewed and sanctified soul. Its earnest desire and endeavour is to please the heavenly Bridegroom ; to render itself acceptable in his sight ; so that he may look upon it with complacency, and may delight to visit and hold communion with it.

With a view to this, believers are much in prayer for the influences of the Holy Spirit to be vouchsafed to them in yet larger and larger measure ; that their Christian graces may be more and more matured, and brought into exercise ; and that they may be enabled more and more to “ walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work.”

Durham, commenting on this place, has the following

very just remarks : “ The operation of the Spirit is here (as elsewhere in Scripture) compared to the blowing of the wind, 1. For its purifying nature. 2. For its cooling, comforting, refreshing power. 3. For its fructifying virtue ; winds, especially in those hot countries, being, both exceedingly refreshing, and also of use to make trees and gardens fruitful. *Lastly*, for its undiscernible manner of working, as John 3, v. 8, “ the wind bloweth where it listeth,” &c.—yet its operation, though undiscernible, hath real effects with it.

Next, by *North* and *South* wind, are to be understood the *divers* operations of that one and the same Spirit (as it is 1 Cor. 12, v 6, 7, 8); sometimes cooling, and in a sharper manner nipping, as the *North* wind ; sometimes working in his people more softly and warmly, and in a still and quiet manner, like the *South* wind ; yet as both winds are useful, for the purging and making fruitful of a garden, so are the divers operations of the Spirit to the souls of believers. All his operations, though some of them may appear rough, yet are useful to such souls, and tend to make them fruitful ; and to this end the most sharp influences contribute, as well as the more comfortable.

The purpose and design of believers in desiring fruitfulness, ought not to be so much their own satisfaction, and the feeding of themselves with comforts, as the satisfaction of Christ, and the pleasing him ; for that is his eating his pleasant fruits ; which is the great desire and design of the Spouse, when she calls for the North and South wind to blow upon her garden.”

Lord, let thy love,
Fresh from above,
Soft as the south wind blow ;
Call forth its bloom,
Wake its perfume,
And bid its spices flow !

And when Thy voice
Makes earth rejoice,
And the hills laugh and sing ;
Lord, make this heart
To bear its part,
And join the praise of spring !

Monsell.

IV.

THE BRIDEGROOM'S DELIGHT IN HIS GARDEN.

I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse ; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice ; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey ; I have drunk my wine with my milk ; eat, O friends ; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.”—Chap. 5, v. 1.

The invitation of the Spouse is accepted by the Bridegroom. He comes into his garden, gathers of its fragrant productions, and refreshes himself with wine, milk, and honey.

Christ has pleasure in his Church. It is to him as a delightful garden. He can say of it, as of Zion in olden time, “This is my rest for ever ; here will I dwell, for I have a delight therein.”

Christ knew by bitter experience, whilst he was upon earth, what the wilderness was. For he was there fasting forty days and forty nights, being tempted of the Devil ; and having none but the wild beasts for his companions.

Christ knew also by bitter experience what was the garden of Gethsemane ; when, “being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”

Christ now, however, has done with all such bitter experiences—now he enjoys the fruits and rewards of former sufferings—now he “sees of the travail of his soul and is

satisfied"—now he delights in the garden of his Church, redeemed by his blood, and sanctified by his Spirit.

We find from the testimony of St. Paul that even a *Minister* of Christ can rejoice, and take pleasure, in one small portion of Christ's garden, which may be committed to his care, when he sees it flourishing and fruitful. "For what is our hope," he says, "or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming. For ye are our glory and joy."

How much more, then, must Christ himself rejoice, and take delight, in the entire Garden of his Church; in that Church of his redeemed for which he laboured and suffered upon earth with such great travail! How must he be pleased and satisfied, when he beholds its order; its well cultivated condition; the fruits of righteousness, and flowers of grace, with which it abounds.

Thus the heavenly Bridegroom delights himself in his garden, in the flowers and fruits of it. Thus Christ rejoices over his redeemed and sanctified Church. "And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people." "And as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee."

The Bridegroom, moreover, whilst himself thus rejoicing, calls others to rejoice with him: "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." This will apply to those "ministering spirits," the angels "sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation."

We are informed by Christ himself that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." How ready, then, must they be to rejoice with the Saviour over the whole company of his redeemed—"that great multitude," seen by St. John, "which no man could

number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, who stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands ; and cried with a loud voice, ‘ Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.’ And all the *angels* stood round about the throne, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen : blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.”—Rev. 7, v. 9, &c.

SEVENTH CANTICLE.

THE BRIDE'S PORTRAIT OF THE BRIDEGROOM, AND HIS DESCRIPTION OF HER IN REPLY.

PLAN OF THE CANTICLE.

This Canticle consists of three parts, or scenes, as they might be called.

The first Part relates the Bride's neglect of the Bridegroom's call, and her vain search for him in consequence.

The second Part contains the portrait, which she drew of the Bridegroom in answer to enquiries concerning him.

The third Part sets forth the Bridegroom's description of the Bride, when he afterwards met with her.

It is difficult to select one Canticle in preference to another, where all are so beautiful ; but perhaps we should not be far wrong in saying, that of all the Canticles of the "Song of Songs" this is the most distinguished, for tender pathos, for glowing description, and for poetical excellence in general.

SEVENTH CANTICLE.

Ch. V, v. 2—16. Ch. VI, v. 1—10.

Authorised version and arrangement.

2. I sleep but my (*a*) heart waketh : it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled : for my head is filled with (*b*) dew, and my locks with the drops of the night. 3. I have put off my coat ; how shall I put it on ? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them ? 4. My beloved put in

his hand by the (*c*) hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him. 5. I rose up to open to my beloved : and my hands dropped with (*d*) myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock. 6. I opened to my beloved ; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone : my soul failed when he spake : I sought him but I could not find him : I called him but he gave me no answer. 7. The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they (*e*) wounded me ; the keepers of the walls took away my (*f*) veil from me. 8. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him that I am sick of love. 9. What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women ? What is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us ? 10. My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. 11. His head is as the most fine (*g*) gold, his (*h*) locks are bushy, and black as a raven. 12. His (*i*) eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set. 13. His checks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers : his (*k*) lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh. 14. His hands are as gold rings, set with beryl ; his belly is as bright (*l*) ivory overlaid with sapphires. 15. His legs are as pillars of marble set upon sockets of fine gold : his countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. 16. His mouth is most (*m*) sweet : yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem. 1. Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women ? Whither is thy beloved turned aside ? that we may seek him with thee. 2. My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies. 3. I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine : he feedeth among the lilies. 4. Thou art beautiful, O my love, as (*n*) Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, (*o*) terrible as an army with banners. 5. Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me ; thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Gilead. 6. Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them. 7. As a piece of a pomegranate are thy temples within thy locks. 8. There are (*p*) threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number. 9. My dove, my undefiled is but one : she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her. The daughters saw her, and blessed her ; yea, the queens, and the concubines, and they praised her. 10. Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, terrible as an (*q*) army with banners.

*Revised Version arranged in the form of Dialogue, chiefly after
Bp. Percy and Dr. Mason Good.*

FIRST PART.

BRIDE.

I was sleeping, but my heart was awake. Lo the voice of my Beloved, who was knocking;

'Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew: my locks with the drops of the night.'

'I have put off my vest, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?'

My Beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my heart was moved for him.

I rose up to open to my Beloved, and my hands dropped myrrh, and my fingers sweet-smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the bolt.

I opened to my Beloved; but my Beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone. My soul failed at the remembrance of his words.

I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.

The watchmen, that go about the city, found me: they smote me, they hurt me; the keepers of the walls plucked off my veil from me.

I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my Beloved, that ye tell him that I am faint with love.

SECOND PART.

VIRGINS.

What is thy Beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? What is thy Beloved, that thou chargest us so?

BRIDE.

My Beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand.

His head is as the most fine gold; his locks are bushy and clustering, and black as a raven.

His eyes are as the eyes of doves, washed with milk, sitting delighted by the full streams.

His cheeks are as a bed of spices, sweetly budding forth; his lips like ruby lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh.

His hands are as rings of gold, well turned, and set with beryl ;
his body as clearest ivory laid over sapphires.

His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon pedestals of fine gold ;
his countenance is like Lebanon, majestic as the cedars.

His mouth is sweetness itself ; yea, he is altogether lovely.

This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

VIRGINS.

Whither is thy Beloved gone, O thou fairest among women ?
Whither is thy Beloved turned aside, that we may seek him with thee ?

BRIDE.

My Beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.

I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine ; he feedeth among the lilies.

THIRD PART.

BRIDEGROOM (MEETING THEM).

Thou art pleasant, O my love, as Tirzah ; beautiful as Jerusalem ; dazzling as an army with banners.

Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me ; thy hair is as a flock of goats that browse about Mount Gilead.

Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep, which go up in pairs from the washing-pools ; which are all of them twins, and none hath lost its fellow.

As the blossom of the pomegranate, so are thy cheeks beneath thy locks.

There are to me threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number.

But my dove, my undefiled, is one ; she stands alone in my affections. She is dear to me, as an only child to her mother ; the darling of her that bare her.

The daughters saw her, and blessed her ; the queens and the concubines, and thus they praised her :

' Who is she that looketh forth as the Morning ; fair as the Moon , bright as the Sun ; and dazzling as all the Starry hosts.'

PARAPHRASE.

—
FIRST PART.
—

BRIDE.

I slept—but not my heart—that, still awake,
Kept watch—when lo ! a well-known voice ! 'twas *his*,
'Twas my Beloved's, as he knock'd, and said :
'Open to me, my sister ! my sweet dove !
My undefiled one ! behold, my head
With the night-dews is fill'd, my locks are dropping'—
I answer'd from within, 'I've doff'd my vest,
How shall I put it on ? my feet I've wash'd,
How shall I now again with dust defile them ?
His hand did my Beloved put within—
But vain the trial—too firmly held the bolt—
Then did my heart relent, 'twas melted in me—
I rose to open to my Beloved—
My hands dropp'd myrrh, my fingers dropp'd sweet myrrh,
As on the bolt they rested—but ah ! me !
Too late ! too late ! for gone was my Beloved ;
So long denied, he had withdrawn himself—
Then thought I of his call, so fond ! so true !
And as I thought, my soul did sink in me,
My spirit waxed faint—straight forth I went
Into the midnight air, and sought for him ;
I sought, but found him not—I call'd aloud,
But no one answer'd—thus I wander'd on—
The city watchmen met me ; with rude hands
They smote, they hurt me—put me e'en to shame—
For my close veil they rent, and tore away,
And left me unprotectedly to roam.
I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem !
If my Beloved ye shall find, to tell him
How I am faint with love—

SONG OF SOLOMON.

SECOND PART.

VIRGINS.

And what, we ask,
Fairest of women ! what is thy Beloved
More than another, that thou charg'st us so ?

BRIDE.

Ruddy and white is my Beloved—None
Among ten thousand can with him compare,
Chiefest of all is he—His noble head,
Worthy its crown of gold, is cluster'd o'er
With bushy locks, black as the raven's wing—
His eyes flash brightly, yet with soften'd light,
E'en as the eyes of milk-white doves, which bathe
Their plumes delighted in the sparkling streams—
Beds of sweet budding spices are his cheeks—
His lips like ruby lilies dropping myrrh—
As rings of gold well-turn'd, with beryl set,
So are his well-form'd hands, and jewell'd fingers—
Fair and clear-skinn'd his body, it doth look
Like clearest ivory, over sapphires laid,
The violet-tinted veins shown faintly through—
Pillars of marble, set on feet of gold,
Are his fine manly limbs—His countenance
As cedar'd Lebanon for majesty—
Yet round his mouth all sweetenesses do meet—
O perfect all ! yea, altogether lovely !
This, O ye daughters of Jerusalem !
This is my own Beloved—this my Friend.

VIRGINS.

O fairest thou of women ! whither gone
Is thy Beloved ? whither turn'd aside,
That we may join with thee in search of him ?

BRIDE.

Down to his garden my Beloved 's gone,
 E'en to his garden with its beds of spices,
 To gather of its flowers, to eat its fruits ;
 I am my Beloved's, and he is mine ;
 He feedeth 'mong the lilies—

THIRD PART.

BRIDEGROOM (MEETING THEM).

O my love !

Pleasant art thou as Tirzah—beauteous
 Even as Zion, beauty's own perfection—
 Yea, as a banner'd host fixes the gaze,
 Makes the heart throb, and flutter with excitement ;
 E'en so art thou, my love ! oh ! turn away
 Those eyes, too dazzling bright ; they overcome me—
 Thy waving hair hangs down so soft and glossy,
 It looks as when a flock of goats do browse
 Spread over Gilead's mountain-side—Thy teeth,
 All white and even set, are as the sheep
 Fresh shorn, which from the washing-stream go up,
 In twin-like pairs, each with its fellow match'd,
 None faulty 'mong them found—On thy soft cheek
 Shaded by tresses, blooms the pomegranate—
 Tho' there be threescore queens I may call mine,
 With concubines fourscore, and at my will
 Young virgin hearts and hands ; yet only one,
 My dove ! my undefiled ! only *one*
 Reigns in my heart supreme ; as dear to me,
 As to a mother is her own first-born,
 As the one precious child to her that bare her—
 The daughters of the land, they saw, they bless'd her—

The queens, the concubines, they saw—and all,
 As with one heart and voice, join'd thus to praise her—
 ‘ Say who is this that looketh out so lovely ?
 ‘ Fresh as the Morn ; fair as the Moon that walks
 ‘ In nightly beauty ; glorious as the Sun ;
 ‘ Yea, as the Starry hosts all brilliant.’

SEVENTH CANTICLE.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

(a) *I was sleeping, but my heart was awake.* It is generally considered that this is the relation of a dream by the Bride to her companions, similar to that which forms the subject of the fourth Canticle. “Indeed (observes Mr. Williams) the expression, ‘I slept, but my heart was awake,’ will scarcely admit of any other interpretation; but in this view is beautifully poetic. The heart is the seat of the imagination, as well as of the affections; and this same inspired Poet tells us, speaking of a man of cares and business, ‘his heart taketh not rest in the night’: that is, his anxiety is continued in his dreams, for ‘a dream,’ he says, ‘cometh through the multitude of business.’”

Let either view however be taken; either that of a dream, or of a real transaction; still the purpose of the Poet is equally clear, viz., to show the intensity of the Bride’s love toward the object of it, by the poignant grief which she experienced at the thought of having slighted him; and by the self-denying zeal, which she afterwards shewed in her midnight search for him, when she was called to suffer such indignities and hardships for his sake.

(b) *My head is filled with dew, &c.* The dews in those countries were very copious, and in some situations injurious.

"There were two sorts of dew (observes Bp. Patrick), the "early dew," which was soon gone (*Hosea 13, v. 3*) ; and "the dew which fell in the night," which lay long, and wet those who were in it very much ; whence it signified in Scripture hardships and great afflictions (*Dan. 4, 25*)."

(c) *By the hole of the door.* "It was the antient custom to secure the door of a house by a cross-bar, or bolt ; which at night was fastened with a little button or pin. In the upper part of the door was left a round hole, through which any person from without might thrust his arm, and remove the bar, or bolt, unless this additional security were super-added."—*Le Clerc.*

"To this day the oriental houses have such a hole in the door, by which the master and domestics open the lock by putting in their hands, while strangers know not how to do so ; for the locks are variously made. At night, when the household retires to rest, additional bolts and bars so fasten the door, that there is no possibility of opening it from without ; but this fastening up is the work of the master of the house, or the chief confidential servant, and of course is not done so long as the master is without, but only when he has retired for the night's rest."—*Weiss.*

(d) *My hands dropped myrrh, &c.* The word here translated "sweet smelling" signifies rather 'liquid,' or 'running about,' as it is rendered in the margin of our Bibles. This was considered to be the best and most valuable kind of myrrh.

It has been suggested that in her haste the Bride had perhaps spilt upon her hands some of this liquid myrrh, which she had provided on purpose to welcome her Beloved's return home. Its excellence and costliness would indicate the strength of her regard for him.

(e) *They smote me ; they wounded me.* Bp. Percy remarks that the Hebrew word, translated in the Common Version "wounded," does not always mean a ghastly *wound*; but sometimes such sharp cuts, or stripes, as are inflicted by

wholesome discipline ; as appears from Prov. 27, v. 6, “ Faithful are the wounds of a friend”—Comp. Ps. 141, v. 5, “ Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness ; and let him reprove me.”

(f) *Plucked off my veil from me.* This was the greatest indignity, which could be offered to an eastern lady ; as the veil was the recognised badge of female modesty and decorum, and for a woman to go unveiled involved the loss of her character.

(g) *His head is of the most fine gold.* This may be taken, either as a mere metaphorical expression denoting consummate excellence and beauty ; or as intimating that he had a “ crown of pure gold upon his head,” as in Psalm 21, v. 3. In the Paraphrase both these ideas are expressed.

(h) *His locks are bushy, and clustering, &c.* Bp. Percy says that a traveller in those countries, where the palm-tree flourishes, assured him that the “ hair may be very aptly compared to the fine wavy young leaves of the palm, on their first bursting forth from the *spatha*, or sheath, in which they are contained.” The Hebrew word translated “ bushy,” or “ clustering,” refers to this.

(i) *His eyes are as the eyes of doves, &c.* “ His eyes are sparkling, and yet mild, like those of milk-white doves, when they are delighted as they sit by the full streams.”

Such is Bp. Percy’s note on the meaning of this confessedly difficult verse. Dr. Good remarks, “ Nothing can surpass the exquisite beauty of the entire portraiture : but this imitable delineation of the eyes is entitled to peculiar notice, and gives us the idea of an equal intermixture of gaiety and tenderness.”

(k) *His lips like ruby lilies.* A reference is probably here made to a particular kind of lily of a rich red colour, which was much esteemed in Syria, and which is called by Pliny ‘ *Rubens Lilium*. ’

(l) *Ivory laid over sapphires.* The Septuagint version is, “ His body is an ivory casket laid over a sapphire,” meaning

that the blue veins were seen through his clear skin, like a sapphire stone through a thin transparent plate of ivory laid over it.

(m) *His mouth is most sweet.* The Hebrew word here translated most sweet, means literally ‘sweetnesses.’

(n) *Pleasant as Tirzah, beautiful as Jerusalem.* The name Tirzah signifies a delightful city, or a city that *pleaseth one.* It was pleasantly situated in the country of Ephraim; and was therefore made choice of by Jeroboam for the seat of his kingdom, and the place of his residence; and so it continued to be a royal city and residence until Omri built Samaria.

Jerusalem also is expressly mentioned in Scripture as “beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth”—and as the “perfection of beauty.”

(o) *Dazzling as an army with banners.* This is a strong figure to describe the imposing and thrilling effect produced upon beholders by the Bride’s surpassing loveliness.

For an explanation of the other comparisons here employed to describe her varied beauties, the reader is referred to the Notes on the fifth Canticle, where the same comparisons have been previously used.

(p) *Threescore queens, &c.* Though the numbers here mentioned seem to us excessive, yet they are small in comparison with what they subsequently became, as stated 1 Kings, 11, v. 1, &c. And therefore it has justly been inferred by Bochart from this passage, that “Solomon composed the poem at the beginning of his reign, before he had run into those great excesses, which he did afterwards.”

(q) *As all the starry hosts.* In the Bible version it is “as an army with banners.” Bishop Patrick gives the following just reason for making the change: “there being a gradation in this place, and all the other expressions relating to the *heavens*, it is reasonable to think that this doth so too; and that we are to understand by it the *armies or host of heaven* (as the Scripture calleth the stars) rather than armies upon *earth.*”

SEVENTH CANTICLE.

PRACTICAL COMMENTS.

I.

THE BRIDE'S NEGLECT OF HER BELOVED'S CALL, AND
HER SEARCH FOR HIM IN CONSEQUENCE.

THE SLEEPINESS—THE VAIN EXCUSES—THE SORROWING
SEARCH—THE REPROVING WATCHMEN.

I sleep, but my heart waketh : it is the voice of my Beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled : for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night. I have put off my coat ; how shall I put it on ? I have washed my feet ; how shall I defile them ? My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him. I rose up to open to my Beloved ; but my Beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone ; my soul failed when he spake ; I sought him, but I could not find him ; I called him, but he gave me no answer. The watchmen that went about the city found me ; they smote me, they wounded me ; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me.—Chap. 5, v. 2, &c.

Before entering upon the particular points of this passage, we would observe that although, as a general rule, the Song of Songs is composed in a strain of exuberant love and joy, such as is becoming to a bridal occasion, where the happy pair are deeply attached to each other ; yet now and then a more plaintive and melancholy note is heard, presenting a contrast not unmusical, and one which is always more or less found in the experience of life—both of *common* life, and of *spiritual* life.

In *common* life the mixture of joys and sorrows is as universal an experience as the succession of sunshine and

rain. In *spiritual* life it is the same. The believing soul, though it does “rejoice in the Lord ;” and though it may, and should, “rejoice in the Lord *always* ;” yet as a matter of fact, and from various causes, it has its seasons of sorrow, as well as of joy ; of rain, as well as of sunshine.

Even in the most favoured instances of mutual love, and of wedded happiness, yet such are the infirmities of human nature that occasions will arise of temporary interruption. Some misunderstanding, or neglect, on the one side will cause estrangement on the other ; and will thus produce uneasiness to both ; until an explanation, and reconciliation, shall have taken place.

An occurrence of this kind forms the subject of the first part of the Canticle now before us.

The Bride, lying drowsy upon her bed, hears her Beloved knocking and calling, but for a time disregards it. In consequence of this neglect on her part he withdraws himself ; and she has to seek him sorrowing, and to suffer much in her fruitless search after him.

Behold ! a Friend stands at your door !
He gently knocks, has knock'd before,
Has waited long, is waiting still ;
You treat no other friend so ill.

But will he prove a Friend indeed ?
He will, the very Friend you need ;
The Man of Nazareth, 'tis He,
With garments dyed at Calvary.

Admit Him, lest His anger burn,
His feet departed ne'er return ;
Admit Him, or the hour 's at hand,
When at His door denied you 'll stand.

“ *I was sleeping, but my heart was awake. Lo, the voice of my Beloved, who was knocking.*”—We are at once reminded of

the language of our Lord to the Church of the Laodiceans, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock ; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me.” Very similar is the case now before us. The Beloved knocks and calls—If the Bride had got up at once, and opened to him, all would have been well. But she lingers and delays till it is too late, and the opportunity is lost.

The sleep described is that of a drowsy person ; sleeping, but with the heart awake. “It is not that dead sleep, which seals the eternal ruin of unbelievers : who, deaf to the invitations of the Gospel, will slumber on, till a louder call awake them—till the voice of the Archangel, and the trump of God, summon them to judgment.” Nevertheless we should remember the admonition of our absent Lord, “Watch ; for ye know not in what hour your Lord doth come.” “Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning, and ye yourselves like men that wait for their Lord, when he shall return from the wedding ; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open to him *immediately*.”

God calling yet !—and shall I never hearken,
But still earth’s witcheries my spirit darken ?
This transient life, these transient joys, all flying,
And still my soul in dreamy slumbers lying !

God calling yet ! at my clos’d door still knocking !
And I my ear, my heart, still not unlocking !
He now is ready, willing, to receive me,
Is waiting now—but ah ! He soon may leave me !

Tersteegen.

THE VAIN EXCUSES.

“I have put off my vest,” &c. Such were the vain and frivolous excuses urged by the drowsy Bride. How true a picture of the state, in which we are too often found, when

opportunities are offered us of communion with our heavenly Master. We have not attended to the injunction, "Watch and pray." We were asleep. A temptation of sloth, or improper self-indulgence, has prevailed. We are perhaps tired with worldly business ; or we are in a foolish and trifling humour ; or for some other equally vain reason we are not ready to seize the opportunity, and it is lost.

Matthew Henry remarks here in his usual quaint style, but also with his usual sagacity ; "Christ calls to us to open to him, but we pretend to have no mind, or we have not strength, or we have not time, and therefore think we may be excused, as the *sluggard that will not plough by reason of cold*. And those who ought to watch for the Lord's coming with their loins girt, if they ungird themselves and put off their coat, will find it difficult to recover their former resolution, and to put it on again ; it is best therefore to keep tight. Making excuses (Luke 14, 18) is interpreted as making light of Christ (Matt : 22, 5), and so it is. Those put a great contempt upon Christ, who cannot find it in their hearts to bear a cold blast for him, or to get out of a warm bed."

Arise ! ye lingering saints, arise !
 Remember that the power of grace,
 When guilty slumbers sealed your eyes,
 Awakened you to run the race ;
 And let not darkness round you fall,
 But hearken to the Saviour's call.

Arise !

Arise ! it is the Master's will,
 No more His heavenly voice despise ;
 Why yet delay, why linger still ?
 He speaks—Awake ye, and arise !
 No longer slight the Saviour's call,
 It sounds to you, to me, to all.

Arise !

German Hymn.

THE SORROWING SEARCH.

“I sought him but I could not find him.”—The hidings of God's face, and the withdrawal of Christ's presence from the soul, are causes of much grief to sincere believers, who may have backslid, but who have also been brought to repent of their backslidings. David never complains of anything so bitterly as of God's hiding his face from him, and for a time forsaking him. How earnestly does he cry, “Be not silent to me ; lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit.” “Hide not thy face from me ; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.”

But still though the soul of the negligent believer may thus be made to taste for a time the wormwood and the gall, yet it need be only for a time. The gracious Saviour will not forsake his people, but will rebuke and chasten them. When he powerfully touches the heart, our drooping graces revive, and our spiritual affections are re-kindled ; then we have done with delays and excuses, and we set ourselves in good earnest to use the means of grace, and to remove all obstacles to our communion with him. “Though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies.”

Let not, then, the Spouse of Christ sink into despondency, but let her seek, in sure reliance on the unchanging love of Christ, to recover her lost happiness.

The following excellent note of Theodore on these words is quoted by Bp. Patrick : “ Let us learn from hence what mischief sloth and laziness do, and in what troubles and pains they engage us. For the Spouse here excusing herself, and not being willing at once to rise to the Bridegroom, is compelled a little after, not only to rise and run down to the door, but to run through the city, and wander about the streets,

and fall among the watchmen ; and by them to be wounded ; and after all could scarce find her Beloved ; to whom if she had at once hearkened, and obeyed his heavenly call, she had avoided all these inconveniences."

The Lord shall come in dead of night,
When all is stillness round ;
How happy they, whose lamps are bright,
Who hail the trumpet's sound !

Wake up, my heart and soul ! anew,
Let sleep no moment claim ;
But hourly watch, as if ye knew
This night the Master came.

Zinzendorf.

THE REPROVING WATCHMEN.

"*The watchmen that go about the city,*" &c.—Mention has been made before, in the fourth Canticle, of these watchmen ; and they were there considered to represent the Ministers of the Gospel, who among other titles applied to them in Scripture have that of "Watchmen." On the occasion now before us these watchmen seem to have performed their office with great strictness, if not with undue severity and harshness.

It forms indeed part of the Christian Minister's office to rebuke and reprove, as well as to exhort. And St. Paul in his Epistle to Titus bids him to "rebuke them sharply." At the same time there may be an excess in this respect, and the heart of the righteous may be made sad, either without sufficient cause, or to an unnecessary extent. Hence St. Paul, writing his second Epistle to the Corinthians, warns them against this very thing ; and speaking of some backslider, whom they had visited with excommunication, he bids them now to forgive and restore him, saying, "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, or censure, which was inflicted of

many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow."

The Ministers of the Gospel therefore may see in the conduct of these watchmen, as described in the Canticle before us, an error to be guarded against by themselves. They may learn from it, that, whilst exercising on the one hand firmness and faithfulness, they should yet be careful on the other hand to avoid anything like roughness, rudeness, or uncalled for severity. "For (says an inspired authority) a bishop, or elder, must not be soon angry, no striker." "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient."

II.

THE BRIDE'S PORTRAIT OF THE BRIDEGROOM.

THE COMPLEXION—THE STATURE—THE HEAD—THE EYES—
THE LIPS—THE ALTOGETHER LOVELY.

My Beloved is white and ruddy, the chieftest among ten thousand. His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven. His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set. His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: his lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh. His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl: his belly is as bright ivory laid over sapphires. His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of gold: his countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. His mouth is most sweet; yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.—Chap 5, v. 10, &c.

THE COMPLEXION.

"*My beloved is white and ruddy.*" The Bride is glad of an opportunity to speak out the praises of her Beloved. She

catches at the question, ‘What is thy beloved more than another beloved?’ to expatiate in a most glowing description of him. Her object is to draw a picture of perfect manly beauty, as representing him.

In applying this description to our Saviour Christ, we must of course do it in a spiritual sense. We are not aware that any *corporeal* beauty belonged to him, any perfection in face or form; but we know and are assured that to him belonged all *moral* beauty, all *spiritual* perfection. M. Henry well remarks on this point, “It was never said of the child Jesus, as of the child Moses, that he was *exceedingly fair* (Acts 7, v. 20); nay, he had no form, nor comeliness; and when men saw him there was no beauty that they should desire him. In him we may behold the “*beauty of the Lord*,” the concurrence of every thing in him as Mediator, to make him truly lovely in the eyes of those that are enlightened to discern spiritual things. He was the *holy* child Jesus; *that* was his fairness.”

The complexion is the first thing mentioned—“My Beloved is *white and ruddy*.” This is the complexion most consistent with our notions of perfect health and beauty.

The combination of the two, white and red, has been taken as suggestive of the different qualifications, which were united in Christ as our Mediator and Redeemer—such as his divine and human natures—his innocent life, and bloody death—his favour toward his people, his fury toward his enemies. “He is *white* in the spotless innocence of his life; *ruddy* in the bloody death, which he died—He is *white* in the glory of his divine nature; *ruddy* in his assuming the nature of man, Adam, “red earth”—He is *white* in his love and favour toward his people; *ruddy* in his terrible appearance, and judgments against his adversaries.”

Such applications may perhaps be somewhat fanciful ; but at least they have the virtue of being, not only harmless fancies, but also ingenious methods of setting forth some most important truths with regard to the person and work of our Redeemer.

THE STATURE.

“The chiefest among ten thousand.”—It is ordained of God (as St. Paul tells us) that “in all things Christ should have the preeminence.” Whatever therefore is excellent among men, or even among angels, the same is to be found still more excellent in Christ. He is “fairer than the children of men.” He has a “name, which is above every name ;” “angels, and principalities, and powers being made subject unto him.”

This is the full meaning of the expression, as applied to Christ, “the chiefest among ten thousand.” The original word refers to the lifting up of a standard, or to a standard-bearer, who by his superior height and bearing is distinguished above the ten thousand that follow him. It was so, we may remember, with Saul ; who was of a truly princely figure, and marked out by his superior stature and presence, from among his brethren, as the future Captain and King of Israel. “And there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he ; from his shoulders upward he was higher than any of the people. And Samuel said unto all the people, ‘See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people.’ And all the people shouted and said, ‘God save the King.’” Thus Saul in his day was the “chief among ten thousand,” distinguished above all his brethren by his princely stature and presence.

This may serve to illustrate the application of the term to

Christ, the “Captain of our salvation,” the true King of the true Israel—distinguished above all others, whether men or angels. Let him be thus distinguished in our esteem—let him be thus exalted in our hearts !

THE HEAD.

“*His head is as the most fine gold.*”—The head is a symbol of sovereignty and government ; and its being of gold denotes excellence and superiority. Thus the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar is compared to a *head of gold* (Dan. 2, v. 38) because it was superior to the other kingdoms.

So the kingdom of Christ is superior to all others in every point—in the extent of its dominion—in the equity of its rule—in the happiness of its subjects—in the length of its duration. And hence the age, in which Christ's kingdom shall be completely established upon earth, will be the really *golden age* ; when he shall universally reign as “Prince of Peace”—as “King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.”

THE EYES.

“*His eyes are as the eyes of doves.*”—The eyes are the mirror of the mind ; and as the mind of Christ was a meek and lowly mind ; pure and gentle ; tender and loving ; so the eyes of the heavenly Bridegroom are justly and fitly compared to “doves' eyes.”

The eyes of Christ could weep with compassion over the doomed city of Jerusalem, and could shed tears of sorrowing friendship over the grave of Lazarus. They could also look with unspeakable tenderness on the fallen Peter, and with that look could melt him into penitence. “Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.”

THE LIPS.

"His lips drop myrrh, his mouth is most sweet."—It was prophetically said of Christ, “full of grace are thy lips;” and that prophetic intimation was fulfilled; for when he was upon earth men “marvelled at the gracious words, which proceeded out of his lips;” and declared that “never man spake as this man.”

The lips of Jesus were *pure* lips—There was no guile, no deceit in his tongue.

The lips of Jesus were *gentle* lips—“When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not.” He had ever a soft, kind, sympathising word for the afflicted—a word of comfort for the penitent—a word of encouragement for the weak and trembling soul. It has been justly and beautifully remarked that the *softness* of the lily was on his lips, as well as its *sweetness*.

THE ALTOGETHER LOVELY.

“Yea, he is altogether lovely.”—Vain are the utmost efforts of human skill to describe the “fair beauty of the Lord.” Like the “love of Christ,” it is something that “passeth knowledge.” It cannot be fully and adequately described, or even conceived of. After all that we can think or speak about it, we must still come far short of the reality; and can only sum up our imperfect ideas with this comprehensive expression of the Bride, “Yea, he is altogether lovely.”

May we be able to say with her likewise, in sincerity and truth, “This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend !”

If but this Friend be mine—
Then from all below,
Leaning on my pilgrim-staff,
Gladly forth I go :
From the crowd who follow,
In the broad bright road, their pleasures false and hollow.

If but this Friend be mine—
Then all else is given ;
Every blessing lifts my eyes
And my heart to Heaven :
Fill'd with heavenly love,
Earthly hopes, or fears, no longer tempt, or move.

Novalis.

III.

THE BRIDEGROOM'S DESCRIPTION OF THE BRIDE.

Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners. Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me : thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Gilead. Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them.

The various beauties of the Bride are here again described, as they were before in the Fifth Canticle. Some of the particular features there mentioned are here repeated.

As we have previously remarked, the Bride herself being a spiritual person, her beauty also must be of a spiritual kind. It is the “beauty of holiness”—an inward and spiritual beauty—a beauty of the soul. It consists of those various virtues and graces, which form the Christian character ; being implanted and nourished in the soul by the Holy Spirit. They are such as are described by St. Paul, when he says, Gal. 5, v. 22, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance”—or again, Coloss. 3, v. 12, “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering”—or yet again, Phil. 4, v. 8, “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are honest,

whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

St. Peter likewise draws a similar picture of the true Christian character, when he says, "Giving diligence add to your faith virtue ; and to virtue knowledge ; and to knowledge temperance ; and to temperance patience ; and to patience godliness ; and to godliness brotherly kindness ; and to brotherly kindness charity."

It is when the heavenly Bridegroom sees these various virtues and graces in lively exercise that he perceives and admires the beauties of his Spiritual Bride. And they are beauties, we may remark, which are not fading and fleeting, like the flowers of earth, the beauties of mere face and form ; but they are lasting as the mind itself. They are ever growing and increasing until they come to perfection ; for the "path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

We cannot indeed attain unto this perfection here, in this present life ; but we shall do so hereafter, in the life to come. *Here alas ! all is defective ; here all is more or less deformed and defiled through sin.* But *there* sin itself will be abolished ; and death also, the fruit of sin. And then the Bride, in her resurrection-state, will appear indeed in the perfection of beauty ; and Christ will present her to himself a "glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."

Oh that we may form part of that Church now—not by any mere "outward and visible sign," but by an "inward and spiritual grace"—so that being united to Christ here in the bonds of faith and love, we may share with him hereafter the blissful and eternal life of Heaven !

A life in Heaven ! oh ! what is this ?
The sum of all that Faith believed ;
Fulness of joy, and depth of bliss,
Unseen, unfathom'd, unconceived.

Whilst thrones, dominions, princedoms, powers,
And saints made perfect, triumph thus ;
A goodly heritage is ours,
There is a heaven on earth for us.

The Church of Christ, the means of grace,
The Spirit teaching through the word ;
In *those* our Saviour's steps we trace,
By *this* his living voice is heard.

Firm in his footsteps may we tread,
Learn every lesson of his love ;
And be from grace to glory led,
From heaven below to heaven above !

Montgomery.

EIGHTH CANTICLE.

THE BRIDE SEIZED WITH A SUDDEN IMPULSE OF FEAR.

PLAN OF THE CANTICLE.

The scene of this short Canticle is laid in a garden not before mentioned, and called the Garden of Nuts.

The Bride is represented as going down to this Garden with a view to meet the Bridegroom. But she is seized with a sudden feeling of fear, which urges her to flee from the garden, that she may avoid keeping her engagement.

The Virgins, her companions, remonstrate with her on the inconsistency of such fear; reminding her, by her name "Shulamite," that she is the Spouse of Solomon; and persuading her to return, that they may still enjoy the pleasure of her presence.

She asks, with self-diffident modesty, what there was in her, which should make her presence desirable. They reply that all graces so meet and harmonize in her, that she may be fitly compared to two choral bands, who with dance and song keep up a perfect unison.

EIGHTH CANTICLE.

Ch. VI, v. 11, 12, 13.

Authorised version and arrangement.

11. (a) I went down into the garden of (b) nuts to see the fruits of the (c) valley, and to see whether the vine flourished, and the pome-

granates budded. 12. Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the (*e*) chariots of Amminadib. 13. Return, return, O (*f*) Shulamite ; return, that we may (*g*) look upon thee. What will ye see in the Shulamite ? As it were the (*h*) company of two armies.

*Revised Version arranged in the form of Dialogue, chiefly after
Bp. Percy and Dr. Mason Good.*

BRIDE.

I went down to the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley ; to see whether the vine flourished, or whether the pomegranates blossomed.

There would I have granted thee my love. But I was not aware of the irresolution of my mind, which made me withdraw swiftly as the chariots of Amminadib.

VIRGINS.

Return, return, O Shulamite, spouse of Solomon ; return, return, that we may look upon thee.

BRIDE.

What do you look for, what will you see, in the Shulamite, the spouse of Solomon !

VIRGINS.

As it were the meeting of two hosts, or of two choral bands.

PARAPHRASE.

BRIDE.

Seeking some quiet cool retreat, I went
Down to the nut-grove garden—there to mark
Its various fruits ; whether the vine-trees flourish'd,
Whether the pomegranates had blossom'd yet ;
When, lo, my soul with thoughts conflicting fill'd—
Hither by love impell'd, yet thither driven
By fear prevailing—prompted me to flee,
I scarce knew why ; as if rapt suddenly
In the swift chariots of Amminadib.

VIRGINS.

Return, O Spouse of Solomon, return,
That we may still look on thee—

BRIDE.

Say, my friends,

What look ye for in me, the Shulamite,
The Spouse of Solomon? look ye for beauty,
Or aught that's worthy praise? ye look in vain—

VIRGINS.

Nay, but we look—nor look in vain—to thee
For all that's lovely, and of good report,
All virtues and all graces harmonized,
Making a perfect whole—even as when
Two choral bands, meeting with dance and song,
Each different parts performing in the piece,
Yet all combine in perfect unison,
No faulty step, nor jarring note, among them.

EIGHTH CANTICLE.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

(a) *I went down.*—Many of the Commentators ascribe these words to the Bridegroom, and explain the whole Canticle as expressive of his fervent desire toward the Bride; so that his soul was thus carried away as in the swift chariots of Amminadib.

But although this is quite in accordance with the style of Eastern love-poetry, yet it is inadmissible here, as the context indicates. And therefore Percy, Good, and others interpret it, as referring to the Bride going down to the

garden of nuts to meet the Bridegroom. Mr. Stuart has the following judicious remarks upon this point: "The words undoubtedly belong to the Bride, because throughout the Book the Bride is the narrator. The Bridegroom never speaks in soliloquy, as she often does; and, whilst she constantly tells of her meeting with the watchmen and others, he never introduces any narrative, except what forms part of a direct address to the Bride."

(b) *The garden of nuts.*—It has been suggested that as the nut-tree naturally grows in a cold climate, it must therefore have been valued as an exotic in Solomon's gardens. Josephus speaks of it, as affording proof of the fine temperature of the air, that it flourished in Galilee, near the lake of Genesareth, along with plants of a warmer region.

In the Septuagint, however, we find it translated "almonds" instead of "nuts;" whilst Dr. Shaw, who thinks that the walnut may be intended, says, "these trees begin to be very shady and pleasant by the time the vines blossom." But perhaps Dr. Good is nearest to the mark, when he suggests that the "term may be taken as a general expression, and equally applicable to the hazle, the almond, the cocoa, the walnut, the chestnut, and every other species of fruit, which is inclosed in a strong capsular pericardium."

(c) *Fruits of the valley.*—The eastern gardens were usually formed in low situations for the advantages afforded by increased shelter, and a more plentiful supply of water. The same Hebrew word means both a valley and a stream.

(d) *There would I have granted thee my love.*—This is found in the Septuagint, but not in the Hebrew copies. Dr. Good retains it in his version, and infers from it (as Bp. Percy also does), that the Bride went down to the garden of nuts to meet the Bridegroom probably by appointment.

(e) *The chariots of Amminadib.*—Bp. Patrick remarks, "It is supposed that Amminadib was some great captain, who pursued his victories, or advantages, with very swift chariots." Instead, however, of being taken as a proper

name, denoting some particular person, it might be divided into two words, and might be translated, as in the margin of the Bible, the “chariots of my willing people.” But in either case the meaning would be the same, viz., that she was carried away by a sudden impulse of feeling, chiefly of fear.

(f) *O Shulamite.*—This in the Hebrew is the same word as Solomon with a feminine termination; and evidently signifies the bride or spouse of Solomon.

(g) *That we may look upon thee.*—The meaning of this expression, according to Bp. Patrick, is “that we may enjoy thy happy society; and the benefit of thy excellent virtues and graces.”

(h) *The meeting of two bands.*—The word here translated “bands,” or as in the Bible Version “armies,” is “Mahanaim;” the same word as is used by Jacob to denote the hosts of angels which met him. It is sometimes used to denote military hosts, and sometimes bands of dancers.

The passage is thus rendered (Dr. Good observes) in the “Bible of the Spanish Jews printed at Amsterdam, anno 5466 according to their own era, *como dança de los reales*; and it must be allowed (he goes on to say) that the Hebrew word here used signifies a rapid but graceful encounter, such as is exhibited in the figure of a *country* or *contre-dance*.”

Bp. Patrick remarks, “The word signifies a company of such as dance or sing. It signifies indeed both *chorea*, a dance; and *chorus*, the company that dances; and may be properly translated, following the Septuagint, “choirs.” We have accordingly adopted in the Paraphrase the term “choral bands.”

EIGHTH CANTICLE.

PRACTICAL COMMENTS.

I.

THE GARDEN OF NUTS.

"I went down to the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley; to see whether the vine flourished, whether the pomegranates blossomed."—What is here translated the “garden of nuts,” may according to the meaning of the Hebrew be translated also the garden of *retirement*. It was evidently a cool, quiet, and shady spot, well adapted for private meditation, or for communion with an intimate friend. In the Paraphrase we have accordingly given it this turn,

Seeking some quiet cool retreat, I went

Down to the nut-grove garden—

Spiritually interpreted and applied, it intimates the importance to the Christian of occasional retirement from the world; of withdrawal for awhile from the world's busy scenes; for religious meditation, for self-examination and prayer, and for more close communion with our divine Head.

We find that the Saviour himself, our great Pattern and Example, was in the habit of thus retiring occasionally, and withdrawing himself for awhile from the busy scenes of his public Ministry. Sometimes he went, we are told, into a mountain apart to pray; and sometimes into a desert place for the same purpose. And on one or two special occasions we find that he took his disciples apart with him, that they too might rest awhile from public duties, and enjoy the benefit of religious privacy.

So will it be, more or less, with all sincere and earnest-minded Christians. They will in this respect imitate the conduct of the Bride as represented in this Canticle ; and will go down (as it were), from time to time, into the garden of nuts, the garden of *retirement* ; that is, they will withdraw for awhile from the public and busy scenes of worldly affairs, and will seek the quiet shade of privacy ; that so they may enjoy, both the pleasure, and the benefit, of religious meditation and prayer, and of more close communion with the Beloved of their soul. *

The following just remarks on this point are made by Mr. Fry : “ In retirement, and private meditation, the Christian character is formed and perfected. Not, however, in the retirement of the idle, of the self-indulgent, or of the trifler ; but in a retirement consecrated to religion, to the cultivation of holy affections, and to the devising of plans of usefulness. ‘ I went down to the retired garden, to see the fruits of the valley ; to see whether the vines were growing, whether the pomegranates had blossomed.’ The Christian has renounced the world, with its pomps and vanities, and all covetous desires of the same. When, therefore, he is released from the stated discharge of his duties in life, the world has no attraction for him ; a secret attachment calls him from the busy haunts of men. He seeks not their praise, nor to be seen of them ; but a far more important concern, the interest of Christ’s kingdom, occupies his attention. His prayer is that all things belonging to the Spirit may live and grow in him, and in this prayer he watches with all perseverance ; nor is he an unconcerned spectator whether the interests of the Gospel flourish or decay round about him.

Such are the cares and employments of him, whom the world misses in its thronged paths of ambition, and of

pleasure ; and deems unhappy, or lost to his proper interests."

The same sound views are forcibly expressed in the following lines of the Christian Poet, Cowper ; which occur in his poem on this very subject, " Retirement " :—

" Not that I mean to approve, or would enforce,
A superstitious and monastic course :
Truth is not local, God alike pervades
And fills the world, of traffic, and of shades ;
And may be fear'd amid the busiest scenes,
Or scorn'd where business never intervenes.
But 'tis not easy—with a mind like ours,
Conscious of weakness in its noblest powers,
And in a world where (other ills apart)
The roving eye misleads the careless heart—
To limit thought, by nature prone to stray
Wherever freakish Fancy points the way ;
To spread the page of Scripture, and compare
Our conduct with the laws engraven there ;
To measure all that passes in the breast,
Faithfully, fairly, by that sacred test ;
To dive into the secret deeps within ;
To spare no passion, and no favourite sin ;
To search the themes, important above all,
Ourselves, and our recovery from the Fall.
But leisure ; silence ; and a mind releas'd
From anxious thoughts how wealth may be increased,
How to secure, in some propitious hour,
The point of interest, or the post of power ;
A soul serene, and equally retir'd
From objects too much dreaded or desired,
Safe from the clamours of perverse dispute ;
At least are friendly to the great pursuit.

* * * * *

Divine communion, carefully enjoyed,
Or sought with energy, must fill each void.
O sacred art, to which alone life owes
Its happiest seasons, and a peaceful close ;
Scorn'd in a world indebted to that scorn
For evils daily felt, and hardly borne ;
Not knowing thee, we reap with bleeding hands

Flow'rs of rank odour upon thorny lands ;
 And, while experience cautions us in vain,
 Grasp seeming happiness, and find it pain.
 Despondence, self-deserted in her grief,
 Lost by abandoning her own relief ;
 Murmuring and ungrateful Discontent
 That scorns afflictions mercifully meant—
 These, and a thousand plagues that haunt the breast,
 Fond of the phantom of an earthly rest,
Divine communion chases ; as the day
 Drives to their dens the obedient beasts of prey.”

II. THE IMPULSE OF FEAR.

“ *I was not aware of the irresolution of my mind, which made me withdraw swiftly as the chariots of Amminadib.*”—The Bride having gone down to the garden, with a view to meet the Bridegroom, seems to have been taken with a sudden feeling of mistrust and fear ; and to shrink from the fulfilment of her engagement. It may be that the sense of his superior greatness, and of her own unworthiness of such honour and distinction, suddenly rose up before her mind, and overcame her. It is evident from expressions, which are dropped by her in other Canticles, that self-confidence or presumption formed no part of the Bride’s character ; but that, on the contrary, she possessed much modesty ; a great sense of personal unworthiness ; and a timidity, such as manifested itself on the present occasion, even beyond what was consistent with her position as the Shulamite, the Spouse of Solomon.

There is something too, we may remark, in Christian experience which answers to this feeling. Though as Christian believers we are reconciled to God through his Son—though being “ justified by faith we have peace with God, through

our Lord Jesus Christ"—yet we are subject, from time to time, to returns of our former fears ; arising from that revived sense of guiltiness, which is caused by the temporary suspension of faith. For it too often happens that faith is weak, and its lively exercise in abeyance, so that the soul, being left without the support which faith supplies, falls a prey to doubts and fears.

At such times there is a backwardness to prayer, a shrinking from communion with God, a disposition even to flee from Him. We see in Adam this first effect of the Fall, when he heard the voice of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day ; and, instead of rejoicing (as heretofore) in the sound of that voice, and giving a glad welcome to the divine presence, he tried to hide himself from it amongst the trees of the garden. "And when the Lord called unto Adam, saying, 'where art thou?' he answered, 'I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid.'"

This is a guilty slavish fear, from which believers are privileged to be free ; as St. Paul says, writing to the Christians at Rome, "for ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear ; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father."

Nevertheless there are times, when, through weakness of faith, and the temporary suspension of its lively exercise, this "spirit of bondage" may again come, even upon those who have believed ; and they may be brought thereby "again to fear." Then their prayers are hindered ; their communion with Christ is interrupted ; and instead of seeking his face with alacrity and joy, as they were wont to do, they are even disposed to flee from him.

The wandering star, and fleeting wind,
Are emblems of the fickle mind ;
The morning cloud, and early dew,
Bring our inconstancy to view.

But cloud, and wind, and dew, and star,
Only a faint resemblance are :
Nor can there aught in nature be
So changeable and frail as we.

Our outward walk and inward frame,
Are scarcely for an hour the same ;
We vow, and straight our vows forget,
And then those very vows repeat.

We sin forsake, to sin return :
Are hot, are cold ; now freeze, now burn ;
Now sink to hell in dark despair,
Now soar to heaven, and triumph there.

With flowing tears, Lord, we confess
Our folly and unsteadfastness ;
When shall these hearts more stable be,
Fix'd by thy grace alone on Thee !

Beddome.

III.

THE SHULAMITE EXHORTED TO RETURN.

“ *Return, return, O Shulamite, spouse of Solomon ; return, return, that we may look upon thee.*”—Matthew Henry here remarks : “ She is invited to return, and the invitation is most earnestly pressed upon her ; *Return, return* ; recover the peace thou hast lost and forfeited ; Come back to thy former composedness and cheerfulness of spirit. Note, good Christians, after they have had their comfort disturbed, are sometimes hard to be pacified, and need to be earnestly persuaded to return again to their rest. As revolting sinners have need to be called to again and again (*Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die*) ; so disquieted saints have need also to be called to again and again, ‘ *Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye droop ? Why art thou cast down, O my soul ?* ’ ”

But further—the timid and fleeing Bride is not merely exhorted to return ; she is also encouraged to do so by the

new name, which she has acquired, and by all which is implied in that name, “*O Shulamite, spouse of Solomon.*”

The Church of Christ, we know, is preeminently the Spouse of the true Solomon, of the “greater than Solomon.” She is the “Lamb’s wife.” It may with truth be said of her, “Thy Maker is thy Husband, the Lord of hosts is his name.” The same too may be said of each individual believing soul. Such a soul is united to Christ by faith, through the Spirit, as by a marriage union. And therefore as a wife bears her husband’s name, so believers bear the name of Christ, and after him are called “Christians”; even as the “Shulamite” took her name from Solomon.

It is well that Christians should ever bear this in mind—their high and holy relationship. For the continual remembrance of it will not only operate as an *incentive* to “walk worthy of their high calling,” to “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing”; but it will also serve as a source of *encouragement* to them in their seasons of depression, and as the means of dissipating those doubts and fears, which will sometimes overcloud their faith, and leave their soul in darkness.

Return, return !
From all thy wandering ways ;
Jesus will save the lost,
The fallen He will raise :
Look to Him, who beckons thee
From the cross so lovingly :
See His gracious arms extended,
Fear not to seek shelter there,
Where no grief is unbefriended,
Where no sinner need despair.

Return, return !
To thy long-suffering Lord ;
Fear not to seek His face,
To trust His faithful word ;
Yield to Him thy weary heart,

He can heal its keenest smart ;
He can soothe the deepest sorrow,
Wash the darkest guilt away ;
Then delay not till to-morrow,
Take His offered gifts to-day.

IV.

WHAT IS LOOKED FOR IN THE SHULAMITE.

“ *What do ye look for in the Shulamite?* ”—This is a question asked by the Bride herself ; and it is an evidence of that modesty and self-diffidence on her part, which we have before noticed ; and of which a similar instance occurs in the first Canticle, where the Bride is represented as confessing her own blackness, and saying, “ Look not upon me, for I am black, for the Sun hath discoloured me.” There, as here, she disclaims all consciousness of beauty ; and all title to praise on that ground, or on the ground of any merit whatsoever as belonging to her.

In like manner it is even so with genuine Christians. They are humble-minded ; little in their own eyes ; unconscious of any goodness in themselves ; unwilling to accept of any commendation or praise, which may be bestowed upon them.

There is a striking illustration of this in a scene, which our Saviour himself describes as taking place in the day of judgment ; when (in answer to his commendation for having given him meat and drink, when hungry and thirsty ; for having taken him in and clothed him, when a stranger and naked ; for having visited him, when sick and in prison;) the righteous shall say, “ Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee ? or thirsty, and gave thee drink ? or when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in ? or naked, and clothed thee ? or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee ? ”

"As it were the meeting of two hosts, or of two choral bands."—There is no doubt a difficulty in the interpretation of this figure, and much difference among the commentators is the consequence. But one thing seems certain that the author intended to describe some fine and beautiful effect, produced by the meeting of two hosts, or companies; whether they be taken to denote "armies," or "choral bands." We have adopted the latter sense, and have taken the meaning of the figure to be that there is in the Bride a variety of virtues and graces, which all unite, harmonize and blend together, like two corresponding choirs of dancers and singers.

This perfection of Christian character is to be looked for in the Church at large; and not only so, but likewise in each individual believer. And although as yet it is not fully manifested; nor will be in the present world; yet there are even now the beginnings of it; and it will shine forth hereafter in all its completeness. Then the image of Christ, which is now commenced in the soul of every true Christian, will be perfected; and the truth of that Scripture will receive its full realization, "all we, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord."

This *full* glory of the Church, as well as of Christ himself, is reserved for the resurrection era—"when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe in that day"—when He "who is our Life shall appear, and we also shall appear with Him in glory."

Then there will be indeed something to "look upon"—a sight worthy of admiring angels to behold; when "unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places shall be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God."

NINTH CANTICLE.

DESCRIPTION OF THE BRIDE'S PERSON BY THE ATTENDANT VIRGINS.

PLAN OF THE CANTICLE.

The Bride, it would appear, is being prepared by her Virgin attendants for a visit from the Bridegroom ; which gives them the opportunity of more closely inspecting her various beauties, and more fully expatiating in their praise. The Bride being thus duly prepared for his reception, the Bridegroom is admitted to her presence ; when he too, as if smitten afresh by her charms, breaks out into a fresh strain of eulogium, “ How fair, and how pleasant, art thou, O my love !”

NINTH CANTICLE.

Ch. VII, v. 1—9.

Authorised version and arrangement.

1. How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O Prince's daughter ; the joints of thy thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a cunning workman.
2. Thy navel is like a round goblet, which wanteth not liquor : thy belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies.
3. Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins.
4. Thy neck is as a tower of ivory : thine eyes like the fish-pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Beth-rabbin : thy nose is as the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus.
5. Thine head upon thee is like Carmel, and the hair of thine head like purple ; the king is held in the galleries.

6. How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights ! 7. This thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes. 8. I said, I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof : now also thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine, and the smell of thy nose like apples : 9. And the roof of thy mouth like the best wine for my beloved, that goeth down sweetly, causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak.

*Revised Version arranged in the form of Dialogue, chiefly after
Bp. Percy and Dr. Mason Good.*

VIRGINS.

How beautiful are thy feet in their (*a*) sandals, O (*b*) prince's daughter ! the joints of thy limbs are as jewels, the handy-work of a skilful artist.

Thy (*c*) waist is like a well-turned goblet, which wanteth not mingled wine :

Thy bosom is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies :

Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins :

Thy neck is as a tower of ivory ; thine eyes as the clear (*d*) fish-pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Beth-rabbin :

Thy nose is as the tower of Lebanon that looketh toward Damascus :

Thine (*e*) head riseth upon thee, like Carmel ; the (*f*) tresses of thine hair are like purple : the king is held in the galleries.

BRIDEGROOM (ENTERING).

How fair, and how pleasant art thou, O my love ! how formed for delights !

This thy stature is like to a (*g*) palm-tree, and thy breasts to clusters :

I said, I will go up to, and climb, the palm-tree, I will clasp its boughs : Yea, thy breasts shall be now as the clusters of the vine, and the smell of thy mouth as fragrant fruits ;

And thy (*h*) speech as the choicest wine, captivating to the palate ; going down sweetly through the lips and teeth, causing the ancient, or those that are asleep, to speak.

PARAPHRASE.

VIRGINS.

How beautiful thy feet, O Prince's daughter !

In their rich-broider'd sandals—thy fair limbs

How aptly knit by joints of finest moulding,

Like some choice piece of jewell'd workmanship,
 Wrought by a master hand !—thy waist, so shapely,
 Seems as a well-turn'd goblet wanting not
 For generous wine—the swell of thy fair bosom
 Is as a heap of wheat set round with lilies—
 Like twin-fawns of the roe thy two young breasts—
 Thy tapering neck a tower of ivory—
 The clear depths of thine eyes like Heshbon's pools,
 Hard by Beth-rabbin's gate—thy well form'd nose,
 Combining dignity with feminine grace,
 Not Lebanon's fam'd watch-tower can rival,
 Which toward Damascus looks—thine head doth rise
 So finely shap'd and set, 'tis like to Carmel
 Its leafy top uplifting gracefully—
 Thy flowing hair is as the royal purple,
 Which, hanging in festoons and folds, doth form
 A canopy of state—the King himself,
 Held by thy charms as by a chain, is waiting
 Till to thy long'd-for presence he may come.

BRIDEGROOM (ENTERING).

How fair art thou ! how pleasant, O my love !
 Unfailing fountain of most pure delights !
 Thy tall and graceful form is like the palm,
 Thy breasts the fruitful clusters—as I mus'd,
 I said within me, ‘I will climb the palm,
 Will clasp its boughs, will taste its pleasant fruits—
 Yea, e'en as clusters of the vine thy breasts
 Shall be to me—the fragrancy of citrons
 Breathes from thy mouth—the charms of thy sweet speech
 Are as the choicest wine ; as wine reserv'd
 For friends best lov'd and valued ; wine that warms
 E'en the cold blood of Age, and makes the lips
 Of those who sleep to mutter forth its praise.’

NINTH CANTICLE.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

(a) *How beautiful are thy feet in their sandals.* The Hebrew women were in the habit of adorning their sandals with embroidery, and even with gold and jewels in the highest rank ; and were careful to have them fit well, so as to display the fine shape of the foot. Judith's sandals are especially mentioned, along with the bracelets and other ornaments of jewels, with which she set off her beauty, when she went to captivate the heart of Holofernes.

(b) *O Prince's daughter.* It would appear from this expression that the Bride was at least of noble, if not of royal, lineage. It does not indeed necessarily imply the latter, since the word here rendered "Prince" is in Ps : 47, v. 10, and in Ps : 107, v. 40, used in the plural number to denote the Hebrew chiefs, or rulers of the tribes. She was therefore probably the daughter of one of these chiefs or heads of tribes. No reference is made to her father throughout the poem, except in this place ; from which it may fairly be inferred that he was dead before her marriage with Solomon. Otherwise, as Bp. Percy well remarks on this point, it can hardly be imagined that she would be exposed to ill-treatment from the *children of her mother* (*i.e.*, by a former marriage), if she had not lost her father, while she was an infant. The same may be inferred also from the contract being wholly managed by the mother ; and from the Bride being, at the time of her marriage, possessed of the vineyard which she brought with her as a dowry.

(c) *Thy waist, &c.* We have adopted Dr. Good's version in this place, who renders "waist" instead of "navel," and "bosom" instead of "belly." The Hebrew words employed admit of both versions, and the ideas conveyed by both are the same, viz., the idea of *fertility*, which is chiefly intended

by the “heap of wheat”; and *elegance of form* by the “rounded goblet.”

Selden in his *Uxor Hebraica* says, “Wheat and barley were among the antient Hebrew emblems of fertility: and it was usual for the standers-by to scatter these grains upon the married couple, with a wish that they might increase and multiply.”

When they had threshed out and winnowed their wheat, the custom in Judea was to lay it in heaps (*Ruth 3, v. 7*), over which a quantity of field lilies were thrown, either by way of protection, or in the manner of garlands as a sign of rejoicing.

(d) *The fish-pools in Heshbon, &c.* We find Heshbon mentioned in *Numb. 21, v. 24, 25, &c.*, as the principal city of Sihon, whose country bordered upon the Ammonites; and it fell to the share of the Gadites, who desired this country, because it abounded with pasturage, and was excellently watered; there being many rivulets and brooks in its neighbourhood, from whence the pools of Heshbon were supplied, being remarkable for their purity, and serenity or quietness.

(e) *Thine head riseth upon thee like Carmel.* The mount Carmel was remarkable for its fruitfulness and for its beauty; its head being covered with a great variety of trees and flowers. A recent traveller says of it, “We spent the whole day in this wondrous Carmel. Here we have no longer the arid and stony mountains of Palestine. Covered with magnificent forests of oak and fir, adorned with thousands of fragrant flowers, by which the breeze is scented, it answers perfectly to its name, which signifies a “fertile land.”

When Isaiah intends to represent the desolation of the land in the most pathetic manner, he exclaims, “Bashan and Carmel shake off their fruits” (*ch. 33, v. 9.*)—“The top of Carmel shall wither,” says Amos (*ch. 1, v. 2.*)

(f) *The tresses of thine hair are like purple.* There are different interpretations of this confessedly obscure and difficult passage. Some have supposed that the colour of the

hair is referred to ; which was dyed, in order to make it look “black toward the roots, but of a deep auburn, or coloured with the Tyrian murex, toward the ends.” Michaclis thinks that the word translated “purple” refers to the spiral form of the shell itself, rather than to the colour which was obtained from it ; and conceives that the tresses of the royal bride were braided into this elegant figure. Dr. Good inclines to the view that a reference is made to the purple ribbons, with which the hair was tied. But the meaning given, observes Mr. Fry, “by the Syriac and Arabic versions seems best deserving of notice. ‘Thine erect head is like Carmel, and the braided tresses of thy hair as the royal purple suspended over theatres of entertainment.’ Hence it is most natural to conceive the allusion to be to some rich canopy of state, which was suspended from the roof of the palace, and which formed to the people of those days a perfect model of beauty.”

(g) *Thy stature is like to a palm-tree.* The palm-tree, says Bp. Patrick, shoots up straight and tall, and therefore sets forth that part of beauty which consists in tallness. The noblest palm-trees of all others were in Judæa, as Pliny writes lib. 13, cap. 4. Whence it was that in after-times it became an emblem of that country ; as we find by a medal of the emperor Titus, with a captive woman sitting under a palm-tree, and the inscription of *Judæa capti*.

(h) *Thy speech as the choicest wine, &c.* The general meaning of this passage is clear enough, though the meaning of its particular terms is somewhat obscure. The roof of the mouth, says Bp. Patrick, i.e., the speech which comes from thence, is compared to the most excellent wine, which was so choice as to be fit only to be presented to the best-beloved friends—so delicious that it went down glibly—and so generous that it put spirit into those who were quite spent with age, and made those that were asleep to speak.

NINTH CANTICLE.

PRACTICAL COMMENTS.

THE BEAUTIFUL BRIDE.

The beauties of the Bride have already been set forth in two former Canticles ; but here we have a description of them again ; and this time in a more full and eulogistic manner than before. “The most admired objects of art and nature,” observes Mr. Fry, “are referred to, as comparisons to illustrate her beauty, ‘the glory of Lebanon, the excellency of Carmel,’ and the perfections of other established standards of beauty, are all supposed to unite in her person, and in the appearance of her bridal ornaments. It is ‘the Queen in gold of Ophir’—‘all glorious within’—‘her clothing of wrought gold.’ When this is applied to the Church of Christ, and to each faithful Christian, it denotes no doubt the perfection of that ‘beauty of holiness,’ in which they shall one day be presented to the heavenly Bridegroom.”

“Of the essentials of the Christian character, and of those graces which form its present excellency, in the sight of God and man, we are not uninformed. ‘Charity’ we know ‘abideth;’ ‘faith’ also, and ‘hope,’ will only be extinguished by their objects being realized in possession. But our present knowledge must vanish away, and that which is perfect must come, before we can describe the beauties of the glorified saint, as he shall be—‘It does not yet appear,’ says St. John, ‘what we shall be; but we know that when Christ shall appear we shall be like him.’”

With this general view of the Bride’s beauty, and its

spiritual application to the Church of Christ, it may not be out of place if we dwell briefly upon some of the particular points of it, which are here mentioned.

1. "*How beautiful are thy feet,*" &c.—This at once reminds us of the words of Isaiah, " How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things." This is the office and work of the Church, which she performs by means of her Ministers, ordained and sent forth for that purpose. They are expressly called " messengers of the Church," and may be well represented as the Church's *feet*, all ready sandalled for her service ; to go whithersoever she may direct ; to carry the message of the Gospel to whatever part of the globe she may appoint. And a beautiful sight it is in the eyes of angels, and of saints, to see these ministerial feet so employed ; to see them active in this their proper work, in carrying out the Saviour's last commandment, " Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature."

How beauteous are their feet,
Who stand on Zion's hill ;
Who bring salvation on their tongues,
And words of peace reveal !

But there is a more individual and personal application to be made of this expression. The feet of every true Christian may be regarded as " beautiful," and are so regarded by heavenly spectators, when found walking in the way in which they should go ; in the way of holiness and righteousness ; in the way of peace and charity ; walking " worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing ;" taking the Gospel for their rule, and proceeding steadily by that rule. It is the proper character of all true Christians that they " walk in the steps of the faith of Abraham ;" that they " walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit ;" that they " walk in love ;" that they " so walk, even as Christ walked."

Oh ! that the Lord would guide my ways,
 To keep his statutes still !
 Oh ! that my God would give me grace,
 To know and do his will !

Order my footsteps in thy word,
 And make my heart sincere ;
 Let sin have no dominion, Lord,
 And keep my conscience clear :
 Make me to walk in thy commands,
 'Tis a delightful road ;
 Nor let my head, or heart, or hands,
 Offend against my God.

2. “*The joints of thy limbs are as jewels,*” &c.—We may get at the spiritual meaning and application of this by a reference to Ephes. 4, v. 15, &c., where Christ is spoken of as “the head, from whom the whole body is fitly joined together and compacted by that which every *joint* supplieth.” And again in Coloss. 2, v. 19, we read of “not holding the Head, from which all the body by *joints* and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.”

These words, as Mr. Stuart well remarks, present a beautiful image of the *unity* of the Church. “The union of all the members of Christ in subjection, in harmony, in love, is constantly represented by the parts of the body perfectly joined together in one. The head is Christ, from whom the whole body is fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth. In the description of the entire person, there is no part so suitable as this admirable joining of the limbs with the body, to set forth the ‘joining together,’ and the ‘compacting’ of the whole body of the Church.”

In this view it may well be said the “joints of thy limbs are as jewels.”

Our common earthly ties are weak,
 Whereon we dare not rest ;
 For time dissolves, and Death will break,
 The sweetest and the best.
 Yet there's a tie, which must remain,
 Which time and death assault in vain.

The kindred links of life are bright ;
 Yet not so bright as those,
 In which Christ's favour'd friends unite,
 And each on each repose ;
 Where all their hearts in union cling
 With Him, the centre and the spring.

The friends of Jesus—join'd to think
 With one desire and aim—
 A chain, wherein link answers link,
 Of heavenly kindred claim :
 How sweet ! when thus each mind to mind
 The pure bright link of love doth bind.

Anon.

But further—these words, the “joints of thy limbs are as jewels,” may be taken as applying, not only to the present union of Christians in mind and spirit, but also to a yet future event, viz., the *resurrection of the body*, when the “dry bones,” which have been scattered, shall come together, “bone to his bone”—“when that which is sown in corruption shall be raised in incorruption ; that which is sown in dis-honour shall be raised in glory ; that which is sown a natural body shall be raised a spiritual body.” Then indeed will the unity of the Church be completed, and its beauty perfected. Then will these words in the fullest sense be verified, “the joints of thy limbs are as jewels, the handiwork of a skilful artist.”

3. “*Thy bosom is like a heap of wheat,*” &c.—The idea intended to be conveyed by the heap of wheat is (as we have before remarked) that of *fertility*—a thing which was considered the greatest blessing, and was therefore most

earnestly desired and prayed for by Hebrew women ; in the hope that they might thus obtain the inestimable honour of giving birth to the promised seed, the long-expected Messiah.

Spiritually applied it denotes the fertility of the Church in bringing forth an innumerable offspring of converts ; in which sense she may justly be called the “ mother of us all.”

We know that a single heap of wheat, if sown in the earth, will spring up and yield a plenteous harvest ; and that harvest, if sown again through successive seasons, will in time so multiply itself as to fill the face of the earth with fruit. The Church in like manner was such at first ; even as a single heap of precious grain. But gradually it grew and increased ; until now it is to be found flourishing more or less in all lands. And in the fulness of time it will (as foretold) fill the earth with a spiritual harvest, the fruit of which shall be reaped by angel hands, and shall be gathered into heavenly garners, even unto eternal life.

All this, however, we must ever bear in mind, is the result of that *first* sowing, of that *one* “corn of wheat,” which was the Saviour himself, and of which he said to his disciples, John 12, v. 24, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone ; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” Christ dying on the cross, was that one “corn of wheat,” which in its infinitely multiplied results has proved, and will yet prove, sufficient to supply the wants of perishing millions—even of that “great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, which (as St. John saw them) stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.”

4. “*Thine eyes are as the fish-pools in Heshbon.*”—The eyes are generally speaking the index of the mind. With

regard to the figure, which is here employed to describe the eyes of the Bride, we may say with Mr. Stuart, “the figure indicates that the eyes, like those pools, were *clear, deep, and quiet.*”

“They were *clear*, reflecting the brightness of the blue heavens above, the image of God, the glory of Jesus Christ. The believer, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, is changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord. Bearing this image he presents it to all men to look upon, and learn what is in God himself. So the sun sheds down his bright beams upon the pools of Heshbon ; and there, as in a mirror, the world may see the hidden glory that fills the upper sanctuary.

“Those pools were also *deep* ; and how changed are the shallow thoughts of the man of the earth, in the hour when he becomes an heir of heaven ; what a depth is now in his views. How shallow are the deepest thoughts of all, who “mind earthly things ;” how short the longest line of all their wisdom ; how soon it reaches the muddy bottom, and either stirs up the mire, or is entangled in the oozy weeds. But the thoughts of God are a great deep ; and the shallowest mind of man that comes into union with that clear unfathomable depth, becomes itself as a clear bright water-pool.

“But further those clear deep pools are *quiet* and calm ; for it is not the deep ocean with its waves, nor the deep river with its stream, but the deep fish-pool with its calm unruffled surface. Neither are they the eyes of hermits in the wilderness, or in the secluded convent ; but they are in the gate of Bath-rabbim, in the thoroughfare of incessant concourse, in the ‘high places of the city.’”

Thus very beautifully is pourtrayed the quiet, meditative, spiritualizing tendency of true religion, which is here

figuratively represented by the eyes of the Bride being compared to the clear, deep, quiet pools of Heshbon.

The following lines may also be quoted as not unaptly describing the same thing—the Christian declaring his sense of the vanity of the world, and the superior pleasures which he finds in religious retirement, and in the contemplation of heavenly things.

I quit the world's fantastic joys,
Her honours are but trifling toys,
 Her bliss an empty shade ;
Like meteors in the midnight sky,
That glitter for a while and die,
 Her glories flash and fade.

Let fools for riches strive and toil,
Let greedy minds divide the spoil,
 'Tis all too mean for me ;
Above the world, above the skies,
My bold and fervent wishes rise,
 My God, to heaven and Thee !

O source of glory, life, and love !
When to thy courts I mount above
 On contemplation's wings ;
I look with pity and disdain
On all the pleasures of the vain,
 On all the pomp of kings.

Thy beauties rising on my sight,
Divinely sweet, divinely bright,
 With raptures fill my breast ;
Though robb'd of all my worldly store,
In thee I never can be poor,
 But must be always blest.

More.

TENTH CANTICLE.

THE BRIDE'S INVITATION TO THE BRIDEGROOM.

PLAN OF THE CANTICLE.

In this Canticle the Bride is the only Speaker ; though both the Bridgroom, and the attendant Virgins, appear to be present. Assured of the Bridgroom's love toward her (which on her part is most fully reciprocated), the Bride invites him to go forth with her, early on the morrow, into the country, that they might together enjoy its beauties ; and she seems to allude to some villa, or country-house, where they might lodge ; and might partake of the fruits, which were there stored up for them. She then gives expression to her fervent desire for the free and uninterrupted enjoyment of his society.

TENTH CANTICLE.

Ch. VII, v. 10—13. Ch. VIII, v. 1—4.

Authorised version and arrangement.

10. I am my beloved's, and (a) his desire is toward me. 11. Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field ; let us (b) lodge in the villages. 12. Let us get up early to the vineyards ; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth : there will I give thee my loves. 13. The (c) mandrakes give a smell, and at our (d) gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old,

which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved. 1. O that thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother ! when I should find thee without, I would kiss thee ; yea, I should not be despised. 2. I would lead thee, and bring thee into my mother's house, who would instruct me : I would cause thee to drink of (e) spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranate. 3. His left hand should be under my head, and his right hand should embrace me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, until he please.

*Revised Version arranged in the form of Dialogue, chiefly after
Bp. Percy and Dr. Mason Good.*

BRIDE.

I am my Beloved's, and his desire is toward me.

Come, my Beloved, let us go forth into the field, let us lodge in the villages.

Let us get up early in the morning to the vineyards ; let us see if the vine flourish, if the tender grape appear, if the pomegranates blossom. There will I grant thee my loves.

The mandrakes there give forth their fragrance, and in the store above our gates are all kind of pleasant fruits, both new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my Beloved.

O that thou wert as my brother, that hath sucked the breasts of my mother : Then, if I should find thee without in the streets, I would kiss thee ; nor should I be reproached or despised for it.

I would lead thee, and bring thee into my mother's house, who would instruct me. I would give thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranate.

His left hand should be under my head, and his right hand should embrace me.

I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love till he please.

PARAPHRASE.

I am my own Beloved's—and his heart
Toward me is drawn with love's intense desire—
Come my Beloved ! let us to the fields,
And in the quiet rural villages
Our lodging make ; let us with early morn
The vineyards visit, and observe the fruits,

Whether the tender grapes do yet appear,
 Whether the pomegranates do blossom yet—
 There will I give thee freely all my love.
 Oh ! sweet the mandrakes smell ; all round they throw
 Their fragrance to detain our steps without ;
 Within there are all kinds of pleasant fruits,
 Both new and old, prepared—fruits which these hands
 Have gather'd, and laid up for my Beloved.
 Oh ! that thou wert my brother, and hadst drawn
 From my own mother's breasts thine infant life ;
 Then, if I met thee in the open ways,
 I could without a blush upon my cheek
 Kiss thee, nor fear reproach—yea, I would bring thee
 Home to my mother's house ; and, taught by her,
 My spiced wine of pomegranates present.
 Then should he fold me in his fond embrace,
 And in his arms a willing captive hold—
 I charge you, Sion's daughters ! stir not up,
 Nor waken my beloved, till he please.

TENTH CANTICLE.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

(a) *His desire is toward me.* The words here used are the “same in effect (says Bp. Patrick), as those which we have twice before met with, viz., ‘My beloved is mine, and I am his.’ For the meaning of this, ‘his desire is toward me,’ is (as Mr. Mede hath observed Dan. 11, v. 37) *he is my husband.* Only there seems to me to be an allusion here to Ps : 45, v. 11 (‘the king shall greatly desire thy beauty,’ &c.), unto which

psalm Solomon, as I take it, hath a respect all along in this poem."

(b) *Let us lodge in the villages.* "Cepharim," villages, are opposed in Scripture to *cities* (1 Sam. 6, v. 18), and signify small towns and hamlets, as we speak; 1 Chron. 27, v. 25; Neh. 6, v. 2.

(c) *The mandrakes, &c.* The Hebrew word *dudaim* is found only here, and in Gen. 30, v. 14; where we read how Jacob's wives contended for them as a present to their husband; which proves that these plants or flowers were rare, and very highly esteemed as possessing some powerful virtue.

(d) *In the store above our gates are all kinds of pleasant fruits.*—Bp. Percy, who translates "in our hoards," remarks that the "gates in Judaea were usually of large size, with a building over them, which served as a repository, or sort of store-room for fruits, or for anything else which had to be kept. Dr. Good observes that "in the original it is all manner of *delicacies*; but as it is probable that these delicacies were citrons, and other refreshing *fruits* of a similar kind, I have preserved the common interpretation."

(e) *Spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranate.* A delicious wine, says Dr. Good, is frequently made from the juice of the pomegranate; and the same juice is often employed in the East to give a pleasant sub-acid flavour to other beverages.

TENTH CANTICLE.

PRACTICAL COMMENTS.

I.

THE FIELDS, VILLAGES, AND VINEYARDS.

Come, my Beloved, let us go forth into the fields, let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine

flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth : there will I give thee my loves. The mandrakes there give forth their fragrance, and at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my Beloved.—Chap. 7, v. 11, 12, 13.

THE FIELDS—OR CHRISTIAN RETIREMENT.

“Come my Beloved let us go forth into the fields.”—These words may be allegorically interpreted, and spiritually applied, as representing *Christian retirement*. And viewed in this light Mr. Fry has the following very just remarks on the passage, “The wish for retirement, so often felt by the truly religious, is here beautifully shadowed forth. The Bride is persuading her beloved husband to retire from the tumultuous city, that she may enjoy without interruption his much coveted society, in the remote scene of rural felicity which she describes.

“Were it the will of God, and could it be made compatible with his duties and engagements in life, the spiritual Christian could form no scheme of happiness more adapted to his taste than some calm and peaceful retreat ; where he might, far from the noisy contests of the world, undisturbed by its cares and trifles, and known only to mankind as the occasional messenger of peace and love, be able to spend the remainder of his days in prayer, in meditation, in the cultivation of religious knowledge, and in those exercises of devotion, which promote the communion of the soul with God.

“Such is often the pious wish of the Christian ; and it is possible, indeed, that particular trials and temptations, with the vexatious “contradictions of sinners,” may extort from him the perhaps too impatient exclamation of the Psalmist, “Oh ! that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness.”

"The Christian, however, retires from the world, not in disgust or disappointment, but knowing in himself that he has in heaven a better and enduring substance. He wishes for leisure to contemplate the fair inheritance. Like the ancient Patriarchs, he has seen the promises afar off, and has been persuaded of them, and embraced them, and has confessed that he is a stranger and pilgrim on the earth. The prospect of his being taken to that heavenly country becomes every day more near ; he would prepare to remove ; he would retire, as it were, to the utmost borders of the world, that he may be nearer God, and ready to go to him when he shall call—he would

‘Walk thoughtful on the silent solemn shore
Of that vast ocean he must sail so soon.’ .

"Doubtless the place and circumstance of that religious retirement, of which we speak, are not obliged to be the pleasant country, the quiet villages ; since in the artificer's garret, or even in the prisoner's dungeon, peace of mind may be possessed, and the joys of the Holy Ghost vouchsafed. But yet, in the view of the Christian in retirement, the beauties of nature have a real and peculiar value. If it were permitted to choose, one would not be confined where ‘the works of men shut out the works of God.’"

If indeed we can say of Christ, in the full assurance of faith and hope, "I am my Beloved's, and his desire is toward me ;" then we can be happy any where ; whether in the city, or in the country ; whether in the contemplation of the beauties of nature, or whether debarred from them. Then in the language of Milton's Eve we can address our great Author and Disposer, and find a Paradise regained :—

“With thee conversing I forget all time,
All seasons, and all change ; all please alike.
Sweet is the breath of morn, her rising sweet,

With charm of earliest birds ; pleasant the sun,
When first on this delightful land he spreads
His orient beams, on herb, tree, fruit, and flower,
Glistening with dew ; fragrant the fertile earth
After soft show'rs ; and sweet the coming on
Of grateful evening mild ; then silent night
With this her solemn bird, and this fair moon,
And these the gems of heaven, her starry train :
But neither breath of morn, when she ascends
With charm of earliest birds ; nor rising sun
On this delightful land ; nor herb, fruit, flower,
Glistening with dew ; nor fragrance after showers ;
Nor grateful evening mild ; nor silent night,
With this her solemn bird ; nor walk by noon,
Or glittering star-light, without Thee is sweet."

THE VILLAGES AND VINEYARDS—OR MISSIONARY ZEAL.

"*Let us lodge in the villages, let us visit the vineyards.*"—This may serve to suggest to us another view of the Christian character, consisting, not so much in a love for religious retirement, as in *Missionary zeal*—whether shewn in looking after and promoting the interests of religion in the remote places of our own land, or in propagating the Gospel among the heathen abroad. For the vineyards here mentioned (as Mr. Stuart remarks) are not like those already referred to, as being in the immediate neighbourhood, either of the Bride's residence, or of the King's palace, but afar off from both. "Let us go forth into the field denotes *distance* ; highways and hedges to be passed along ere the vineyards can be reached. These are the out-field population. To them the Christian would now go forth, and would have the presence of Christ to go with him.

" But there is more than distance here denoted ; for there is *residence* contemplated, as well as journeying ; not permanent indeed, but such as implies a removal from home, and the uncertainties and hardships incident to 'going forth

into the fields, and lodging in the villages.' Blessed are they, who count all things loss for Jesus Christ ; who keep not within the narrow home-line of other men's labours ; who forsake houses and lands for Christ's sake and the Gospel ; either permanently, or for a season, according to the Master's work and call. How much in this way is still to be done in all lands, how much in our own land !"

"This verse," says Bp. Patrick, "supposes the fields mentioned, v. 11, not to have been quite uncultivated ; but that there were vineyards (that is *churches* in the mystical sense) planted in them. And the desire of the Bride is that the Bridegroom would accompany her in visiting them *early* ; that is very *diligently*, as the word signifies in many places. Thus Theodoret here expounds it, 'It behoveth us to use all fitting diligence in visiting those that have already received the preaching, to see whether they bring forth more than leaves, and whether any beginnings of charity appear among them.' For so he expounds, 'if the pomegranates blossom.' And this, saith he, is the greatest expression of love to Christ ; which he makes the meaning of those words 'there will I give thee my loves.' For whatsoever care we bestow upon them, he accounts as done to himself ; according to his own words, 'inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of these, ye have done it unto me.' "

There was a remarkable illustration of this view in the earliest times of Christianity. The Church from the beginning shewed herself to be a *Missionary Church*. After her settlement in the city of Jerusalem, the Bride was not long in saying, "Come let us go forth into the field, let us lodge in the villages ; let us rise up early to the vineyards," &c.

The disciples, we are told, after the death of Stephen, went everywhere preaching the word. They soon evangelized

Samaria ; and “travelled as far as Phœnix, and Cyprus, and Cyrene.” Ere long it could be said that “all they that dwelt in Asia had heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.” Even a single missionary, St. Paul, could declare for himself, “from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ. Yea, so have I strived to preach the Gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation ; But as it is written, ‘To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see : and they that have not heard shall understand.’”

Such was the Missionary spirit, so earnest, diligent, and self-denying, which pervaded those early times of Christianity. And this missionary zeal, we may observe, is invariably a sign of spiritual life and energy, both in the Church generally, and in the individual Christian.

In proportion as our souls prosper and are in health—according to the sincerity and strength of our love to Christ—so will there be on our part an earnest desire, and diligent endeavour, to carry out our Saviour’s last command, “Go teach all nations”—“Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.”

Such is the heavenly Bridegroom’s expressed wish and will—the Bride says in obedient response to it, “Come let us go forth into the fields, let us lodge in the villages ; let us get up early to the vineyards ; let us see if the vine flourish ; if the tender grapes appear ; if the pomegranates blossom.

The following German Missionary Hymn is appropriate to the subject. It is entitled “The Missionary on the Sea Shore,” and is written on those words, Acts 16, v. 9, “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night : There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us.”

Dark mighty Ocean, rolling to our feet !
 In thy low murmur many voices meet,
 The sounds of distant lands, brought strangely near
 To Fancy's ear.

From shores unknown comes the sweet Sabbath bell,
 New languages the old glad tidings tell,
 We hear the hymn of praise, the Martyr's song,
 All borne along.

And starting at the summons we obey,
 And o'er the waves prepare to find our way,
 Leaving the ties of country and of home,
 Ocean, we come !

Our chariot thou to bear us to the lands,
 Where fields of promise wait our willing hands ;
 Thou and ourselves are servants to fulfil
 Our Master's will !

And whether in thy depths we find a grave ;
 Or with our heart's-blood dye the distant wave ;
 Or with glad hopes upon thy billows borne,
 Homewards return :

Whether to death or life our course leads on ;
 The Master knows—His holy will be done !
 To life eternal, when all storms are past,
 We come at last.

II.

CHRIST OUR BROTHER—CHRIST CONFESSED BEFORE MEN.

O that thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother ! when I should find thee without I would kiss thee ; yea, I should not be despised. I would lead thee, and bring thee into my mother's house, who would instruct me. I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine, of the juice of my pomegranate.—Ch. 1, v. 1.

CHRIST OUR BROTHER.

“O that thou wert as my brother,” &c.—Christ is represented in Scripture, we may observe, as related to his Church in every way, which is calculated, either to command her

respect, or to engage her affection, or to secure her confidence. For example—He is her Lord, her King, to command her respect ; He is her Bridegroom, her Husband, to engage her affection ; He is her Brother, her Friend, to secure her confidence.

The Son of God did verily become our Brother at his incarnation, when he took on him our nature and was made man ; when the “Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” This is referred to by St. Paul, Heb. 2, v. 14, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same ; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them *brethren*, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the Church I will sing praise unto thee.” Our Saviour himself, whilst he was upon earth, acknowledged this human relationship toward all his true disciples and followers ; as for instance on that occasion when “one came and said to him, Behold thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered, and said unto him, Who is my mother ; and who are my brethren ? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother, and my brethren ! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

One there is above all others
 Well deserves the name of Friend ;
 His is love beyond a brother's,
 Costly, free, and knows no end :
 They who once his friendship prove,
 Find it everlasting love.

When he liv'd on earth abas'd,
 “Friend of Sinners” was his name ;
 Now to highest glory rais'd,
 He rejoices in the same :
 Still he calls them brethren, friends,
 And to all their wants attends.

Oh ! for grace our hearts to soften !
 Teach us, Lord, at length to love ;
 We alas ! forget too often
 What a Friend we have above ;
 But when home our souls are brought
 We will love Thee as we ought.

Newton.

CIRIST CONFESSED BEFORE MEN.

“When I should find thee without, I would kiss thee ; yea, I should not be ashamed.”—The Spouse here expresses a wish (it may perhaps be also called a weakness) that the Beloved was as her brother ; for this reason, that she might then, without fear of reproach or shame, openly declare her attachment to him ; or might kiss him, even in the presence of strangers.

We must bear in mind however, as Christians, that there is a direct command given us to *confess* Christ before men, and a direct warning also of the sin and danger of being *ashamed* of Christ. “ Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall be ashamed of me, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father’s, and of the holy angels.” We must beware then of giving way to a feeling of false shame ; but must be ready to declare openly our attachment to Christ and his cause ; or, as it were, to kiss him even in the presence of strangers. It was the want of this moral courage, of this Christian fortitude, which led to Peter’s fall, and which cost him afterwards such bitter tears of repentance.

There is a remarkably plain direction given us in Scripture on this point, viz., “ Kiss the Son.” And the meaning of this expression is that we should render unto Christ the honour and regard which are his due—that we should give

him the kiss of religious faith and worship ; the kiss of loyalty and allegiance ; the kiss of friendship and love. For in each of these senses the term “kiss” is used in the figurative language of Scripture.

1. A “*kiss*” is used as an outward token of religious *faith and worship*, as it is said, “all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that hath not kissed him”—and again, “let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves.” What these idolators did to their false gods, and false saviours, we are to do to Christ, the true God, and the true Saviour. We are to give him the kiss of religious faith and worship.

2. A “*kiss*” is used to denote the *loyalty and allegiance*, which subjects offer to their king. And this likewise is what, as Christians, we are required to render to our Lord Jesus Christ. For he is exalted to be a “Prince,” as well as a Saviour ; and one of the express titles by which he is called is “King of Saints.”

3. A “*kiss*” is used as an outward expression of *friendship and love*. Thus of her, who “kissed the feet of Jesus,” it is said, that she “loved much.” And this, it need be scarcely said, is what we all owe to him, “who loved us and gave himself for us.” To every one, who professes to be his disciple and follower, he still says, what he said to Peter, “Lovest thou me ?”

It is in this threefold sense that we are to obey the Scriptural direction, which says, “Kiss the Son”—We are to present to Christ the kiss of religious faith and worship ; the kiss of loyalty and allegiance ; the kiss of friendship and love. And this we must be ready to do, not merely in secret, but openly. We must beware, as we said at first, of that feeling of shame (too common), which would cause us to shrink from confessing Christ before men, from making

an open avowal of our faith in him, and of our love toward him.

Jesus, and shall it ever be,
A sinful worm ashamed of thee ?
Forbid it, Lord ; thee I confess,
Before both friends and enemies.

Ashamed of Jesus, of my God,
Who purchas'd me with his own blood ?
Of Him, who to retrieve my loss,
Despis'd the shame, endur'd the Cross ?

Ashamed of Jesus, of that Friend,
On whom my soul's best hopes depend ?
No—rather let this be my shame,
That I no better praise His name !

Ashamed of Jesus, of my Lord,
By all the angelic hosts ador'd ?
No—rather let me boast of Thee
In time and in eternity !

And when I stand before thy throne,
Me 'fore thy heavenly Father own ;
Then shall the holy angels see
Thee, Jesus, not ashamed of me.

ELEVENTH CANTICLE.

LOVE UNQUENCHABLE.

PLAN OF THE CANTICLE.

This Canticle, like the fifth, opens with a question, which we may suppose to be put by the Virgins ; who seeing two persons approach, the one leaning upon the other, ask, ‘ Who is it ? ’ The Bridegroom and Bride then appearing, the former reminds the latter of the time and place of their first engagement. The Bride takes occasion to claim from him a faithful and constant observance of the engagement then formed between them, avowing her own entire devotedness to him. The Bridegroom, on his part, makes a similar avowal, and declares that true love is above all price ; that it is unconquerable, unquenchable.

ELEVENTH CANTICLE.

Ch. VIII, v. 5—7.

Authorised version and arrangement.

5. Who is this that cometh up from the (*a*) wilderness, leaning upon her beloved ? I (*b*) raised thee up under the apple tree : there thy mother brought thee forth : there she brought thee forth that bare thee.
6. Set me as a (*c*) seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm : for (*d*) love is strong as death ; jealousy is cruel as the grave : the coals thereof are (*e*) coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.
7. Many waters cannot (*f*) quench love, neither can the floods drown it : if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.

*Revised Version arranged in the form of Dialogue, chiefly after
Bp. Percy and Dr. Mason Good.*

VIRGINS (SEEING THEM APPROACHING).

Who is this that cometh up from toward the wilderness, leaning on her Beloved ?

BRIDEGROOM (ENTERING WITH THE BRIDE).

I wooed thee beneath this citron-tree ; here thy mother brought thee and plighted thee to me ; here she who bare thee plighted thee to me.

BRIDE.

O set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm ; for love is strong as death ; jealousy is cruel as the grave ; the flames thereof are as arrows of fire, which Jehovah kindleth in the clouds.

BRIDEGROOM.

Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it ; if a man should offer all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly despised.

PARAPHRASE.

VIRGINS.

Say, who is this from toward the wilderness
That cometh up, leaning on her Beloved ?

BRIDEGROOM.

There 'neath the citron-tree I woo'd and won thee—
There did thy mother bring and plight thee to me,
And she who bare thee sanction'd thy consent.

BRIDE.

Oh ! set me as a love-seal on thine heart,
Hidden from all but thine own consciousness—
Yea—set me as a seal upon thine arm,
To meet thine eye each hour continually—
For strong as death, and stern, is jealous love,
E'en as the grave inexorably stern,
Its object to retain— It burns like fire ;
Its winged arrows, tipped with lightning flame,
Do scorch the spirits up, the soul consume.

BRIDEGROOM.

Oh ! love 's unquenchable—its sacred spark
E'en many waters cannot quench ; no floods
Can overwhelm or drown it ; should one offer
Thousands of gold and silver, all the wealth
His house could boast, for love—'t would be despis'd,
With withering scorn be utterly rejected.

ELEVENTH CANTICLE.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

(a) *From toward the wilderness.* This expression has occurred in a former Canticle, and is supposed to signify that part of the royal pleasure-grounds, which lay in the direction of the wilderness.

Bp. Patrick has this remark on the passage, “The Bride having been in the fields and villages, visiting the vineyards, and other places, is now introduced as coming back from thence into the royal city ; which being seated on high, in comparison with the plains out of which she came, she is said to *ascend* or *come up* ; and that she might not be tired with the journey she is represented as “leaning on her beloved.”

(b) *I raised thee up, &c.* There are two ways of interpreting this difficult passage. 1. That which is adopted in the Common Version, which supposes the Bridgroom to allude to his having “raised up,” or rescued the Bride, when as an infant she was exposed, and in danger of perishing. 2. That of more recent commentators, who conceive that the allusion is to the wooing of the Bride, and her mother's plighting her, which was necessary according to the Jewish law—the mother's consent being required to the validity of the marriage.

The latter interpretation is that, which we have adopted, after Percy, Good, and others ; as being the least encumbered with difficulties, and as yielding a consistent sense most suitable to the context.

(c) *As a seal upon thine heart, &c.* A custom is here alluded to of having the name of a beloved person engraven upon a seal or jewel, and wearing it suspended by a chain next the heart, or upon the arm or finger—"that it might testify," as Bp. Patrick remarks, "their great esteem of such persons, and the constancy of their affection toward them, and that they desired they might never slip out of their memory. That "seal upon the heart," some think, relates to the inward affection ; and "seal on the arm" to the outward expressions of it.

(d) *For love is strong as death, &c.* This was the reason why she made the above request ; because of the vehemency of her love, which had grown to the highest degree of jealousy (which is nothing but the highest degree of love), lest she should lose him again, as she had done before.

(e) *As arrows of fire.* The word translated in the Bible Version "coals of fire" is more properly rendered "darts or arrows of fire"—and may well be considered as referring to the lightning, which is emphatically called the "fire of God." —Job 1, v. 16.

(f) *Many waters cannot quench love.* This, as Bp. Patrick observes, is a metaphor, whereby profane authors also have set forth the mighty unconquerable power of love. What new mode of conflagration is this (saith Philostratus in one of his Epistles), for a quencher of this fire is the most impossible to be found. If one bring it from the fountain, or if he take it out of the river, it is all one ; for the water itself is burnt up by love.

By *many waters* are sometimes meant in Scripture *many afflictions*, as is well known ; but though there should be an *inundation* of them, we are here told that they cannot overwhelm or drown love.

ELEVENTH CANTICLE.

PRACTICAL COMMENTS.

I.

COMING UP FROM THE WILDERNESS—LEANING ON THE BELOVED.

1. “*Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness?*”—We may take these words as representing the case of the true Christian, the true believer, coming up from the wilderness of this world, on his way to the new Jerusalem, which is in that “better country,” the heavenly Canaan.

Spiritually viewed this world is indeed as a *wilderness* to the soul. It is to the soul what the wilderness was to the Israelites ; described by Moses as a “place of deserts and pits, a place of drought and of the shadow of death—a place wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions, where there was no water.”

Such a *wilderness* to the soul is this “present evil world.” It contains no spiritual food, by which the soul can be nourished and supported : it cannot afford to the soul any true rest or happiness. The world offers to us indeed its pomps and pleasures, its comforts and good things ; and these may suffice us for a season, but it can only be for a season. They cannot profit us at those times when they are most needed ; such as times of trouble, or sickness ; or in the prospect of death and eternity.

Solomon had fully tried “the world, and the things that are in the world ;” and what was the conclusion to which he came, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity, saith the Preacher.”

The young and inexperienced, destitute of the grace of God, take a different view of the world, and have different feelings toward it. They naturally love the world, and seek their happiness in it. And therefore the world to them seems more like a pleasant garden than a dreary and dangerous wilderness ; and their great object is, not to get well and safely out of it, but to stay as long in it, and to enjoy as much of it, as they can.

Far otherwise with those, whose minds are spiritually enlightened. They were once blind, but now they see. Now they see and feel that the world is indeed as a wilderness, having nothing in it for the soul's true comfort and support.

Hence the world is utterly renounced by them, as their place of rest. They turn from it as altogether unable to satisfy them, and to make them happy. They turn from it to Christ, and the religion of his Gospel. They seek now their happiness in Him, who has said, "Come unto me, all who labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Thus every true Christian may well be represented as coming up from the wilderness of this world ; accounting himself a "pilgrim and stranger on the earth," seeking a "better country, that is, a heavenly."

Saviour, thro' the desert lead us,
Without thee we cannot go ;
Thou from Egypt's bonds hast freed us,
Thou hast laid the tyrant low ;
Let thy presence
Stay with us our journey through !

What ! though all be waste and cheerless,
Where our heavenward course doth lie ;
Rendered by thy presence fearless,
We may every foe defy ;
Nought shall move us,
Whilst we have our Saviour nigh.

2. "*Leaning upon her beloved.*" — This intimates the manner, in which the Church, or the believing soul, comes up out of the wilderness of this world. It is not alone, but in company with another. It is not in her own strength, but leaning for support on her Beloved.

This leaning on the Beloved implies two things—the believer's *dependance* on Christ, and the believer's *love* toward Christ.

(1.) The believer leans on Christ in the way of *dependance*. He depends on Christ entirely for his salvation. He feels that in himself he *is nothing*, and *has nothing*, and can *do nothing*; being but a poor, weak, sinful, creature; without righteousness, and without strength. But at the same time he knows that Christ is all-sufficient; that in Christ all fulness dwells; that He can supply every spiritual want, and is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him. Therefore the believer *leans* (as it were) on Christ. He *depends* on Christ entirely for all that is necessary to his salvation. He depends on the blood of Christ for the pardon of his sins. He depends on the righteousness of Christ for his justification before God. He depends on the grace and Spirit of Christ for his sanctification.

It is by this *leaning*, or *depending* on Christ, that the true Christian is distinguished from all others. For whilst others lean on an "arm of flesh," whilst others depend on themselves, on their own strength, on their own righteousness; the true Christian, the true believer, depends on Christ alone. And happy indeed are they who do so; for they who thus lean on the arm of Christ, lean on the arm of an almighty Saviour, who is able to support them under every trial, to deliver them out of every danger, and to bring them safely through all difficulties to their journey's end.

(2.) But again—the believer's leaning on Christ is in a spirit of *love*, as well as of dependance. It is not merely leaning upon the arm of a kind and benevolent *stranger*, but of a well-known and beloved *friend*. And therefore it is said, “who is this that cometh up out of the wilderness, leaning on her Beloved?” Christ is the Beloved of every believing soul. Every true Christian can say of Christ, as the Bride says in a former Canticle, “This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend.” Every true Christian can say with the Apostle Peter, “Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.”

Thus is Christ the Beloved of his Church. Whilst the world can see no form nor comeliness in him, and in *their* eyes he hath no beauty that they should desire him ; yet to his believing people Christ is the “chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely.” They love him, because he first loved them. They love him because of the sufferings which he has endured for their sakes ; and they love him because of the great benefits, which he has thus procured for them. Hence they may be well represented as coming up out of the wilderness of this world, not only depending on Christ as their Saviour, but also leaning on Him as their Beloved, and their Friend.

O Holy Saviour ! Friend unseen !
The faint, the weak, on Thee may lean ;
Help me throughout life's varying scene
By faith to cling to Thee !

Though far from home, fatigued, opprest,
Here I have found a place of rest ;
An exile still, yet not unblest,
While I can cling to Thee !

What ! though the world deceitful prove,
And earthly friends and joys remove,
With patient uncomplaining love
Still will I cling to Thee !

What ! though I seem to tread alone
 Some barren waste, with thorns o'er-grown ;
 A voice of love, in gentlest tone,
 Whispers " Still cling to Me."

Blest is my lot whate'er befall ;
 Nought can disturb me, nought appal ;
 Whilst, as my stay, my strength, my all,
 Saviour, I cling to Thee !

Elliott.

II.

THE LOVE UNCONQUERABLE—THE LOVE UNQUECHABLE.

1. "*For love is strong as death,*" &c.—This vivid description of love will apply both to divine and human love—both to the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the love which every believing soul feels towards him. The latter love springs from the former, for "we love him, because he first loved us;" and therefore it is love of the same kind, inferior only in degree; as the finite is inferior to the infinite.

Upon the words now before us Mr. Stuart has the following very just and beautiful remarks—"Death in its own sphere is strong, and seems omnipotent; but it cannot conquer love. Death with all its terrors was set before the Lord Jesus Christ, as the price of his love to lost men; but it deterred him not. He loved us, and gave himself for us; enduring the Cross, and despising the shame. Death too has been ten thousand times set before the Bride of the Lamb; and she too "loved not her life unto the death;" for "neither death, nor life, is able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." These two mightiest combatants in the universe have met together, and measured their strength, Death and Love; and Love has prevailed over Death in the conflict. This love on the part of

the Redeemer has awakened a corresponding love on the part of his redeemed, strong also as death ; seeking to be set as a seal on his heart, and as a seal on his arm, to be borne through the midst of death."

Thus the love of Jesus, the Redeemer, and the love of his redeemed people toward him, is love *unconquerable* ; stronger even than death itself, which is the strongest, as it is also the "last," enemy.

2. "*Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.*"—It is a love *unquenchable*, as well as unconquerable. The same Author remarks, "If waters could have quenched the love of Jesus, or the floods have drowned it, his love had perished in the many billows that passed over him. Through waters of cold indifference and hatred on the part of those whom he came to save ; through floods of ungodly men that compassed him about ; through the dark flood of his Father's wrath—through all these the Redeemer passes, and his love is not quenched. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Our many provocations have not quenched his love, nor has it been drowned by the floods of our iniquities ; but all the love that burned on earth in the heart of Jesus is burning for ever in its strength."

Well indeed might the Apostle desire and pray for the Ephesian Christians, "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

Well too might the same Apostle exclaim, in view of this unconquerable and unquenchable love, both on the part of the Redeemer, and of the redeemed, "Who, or what, shall

separate us from the love of Christ ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword ? For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

O Love divine ! Harp, lift thy voice on high !
 Shout, angels ! shout aloud, ye sons of men !
 And burn, my heart, with the unquenchable flame !
 My lyre ! be eloquent with endless praise !
 O love divine ! immeasurable Love !
 Stooping from heaven to earth, from earth to hell,
 Without beginning, endless, boundless Love !

Pollok.

A sweet but solitary beam,
 An emanation from above,
 Glimmers o'er life's uncertain dream—
 We hail that beam, and call it Love !
 But fainter than the pale star's ray
 Before the noontide blaze of day ;
 And lighter than the viewless sand
 Beneath the wave that sweeps the strand ;
 Is all of love that man can know—
 All that in angel breasts can glow—
 Compar'd, O Lord of Hosts ! with thine,
 Eternal—fathomless—divine !
 That love, whose praise with quenchless fire
 Inflames the blest seraphic choir ;
 Where perfect rapture reigns above,
 And love is all—for Thou art Love !

Dale.

TWELFTH CANTICLE.

THE CONCLUSION.

PLAN OF THE CANTICLE.

The Bride, it would seem, having received the fullest assurance of the Bridegroom's love for her, and of her acceptance with him, ventures to intercede for a little sister ; that she too might enjoy the royal favour and protection, and that a suitable provision might be made for her, when she should come to a marriageable age. This request is readily granted by the Bridegroom.

Then the Bride speaks of the transfer to Solomon of a vineyard, which had been her own property ; and the Canticle concludes with mutual expressions of attachment, and with mutual wishes that the happiness thus begun might always continue.

TWELFTH CANTICLE.

Ch. VIII, v. 8—14.

Authorised version and arrangement.

8. We (*a*) have a little sister, and she hath no breasts : what shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for ? 9. If she be a (*b*) wall, we will build upon her a palace of silver : and if she be a door, we will inclose her with boards of cedar. 10. I am a wall, and my breasts like towers : then was I in his eyes as one that found favour. 11. Solomon had a (*c*) vineyard at Baal-hamon ; he let out the vineyard unto keepers ; every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand pieces of silver. 12. My vineyard, which is mine,

is before me : thou, O Solomon must have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred. 13. Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice ; cause me to hear it. 14. Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.

*Revised Version arranged in the form of Dialogue, chiefly after
Bp. Percy and Dr. Mason Good.*

BRIDE.

We have a little sister, whose breasts are not yet grown ; what shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for in marriage.

BRIDEGROOM.

If she be a wall, we will build upon her towers of silver ; and if she be a door, we will inclose her with a wainscoat of cedar.

BRIDE.

I am myself a wall, and my breasts like towers ; therefore was I in his eyes as one that found favour.

Solomon hath a vineyard in Baal-Hamon ; He hath let out the vineyard to keepers ; who for the fruit thereof were each to bring him a thousand pieces of silver.

My vineyard, which before brought me in a thousand, is now thine, O Solomon ; and there are two hundred pieces for them that look after the fruit thereof.

BRIDEGROOM.

Thou that has taken up thy residence in my gardens, the companions are attentive to thy voice ; cause me still to hear it.

BRIDE.

Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like a young roe, or a young hart upon the mountains of spices.

PARAPHRASE.

BRIDE.

There 's one who claims our care, a little sister,
Whose breasts yet budding tell her tender age—
How shall we due provision make for her,
Against the time she shall be asked in marriage ?

BRIDEGROOM.

Provision due we'll make her—Is she a wall ?

Two silver turrets on that wall we 'll build—
Is she a door ? that door we 'll case with cedar,
Fair to the eye, and fragrant to the smell.

BRIDE.

Yea, I too am a wall, my breasts as tow'rs ;
'Twas this which gave me favour in his sight—
To Solomon belongs in Baal-Hamon
A vineyard, which to husbandmen is let ;
Who each a thousand silver pieces bring him,
Rent for the fruits thereof—a vineyard like
Once too was mine, and a like rental brought me,
A thousand silver pieces ; and withal
Two hundred pieces more for those who kept it—
But now, O Solomon, my vineyard 's thine.

BRIDEGROOM.

O thou that mak'st these gardens thine abode,
The virgins that do bear thee company
Thy sweet voice always hear—O grant to me
To hear that sweet voice too, to hear it always !

BRIDE.

Haste, my beloved, ever haste to me !
Be as a light-footed roe, as a young hart,
Bounding upon the mountains of spices !

TWELFTH CANTICLE.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

(a) *We have a little sister.* The plural pronoun "we" may here be used to intimate the completeness of the marriage union ; so that through community of interests her sister had

now become her husband's sister likewise. As Mr. Fry remarks : "The Bride, happy in her own union with her Beloved, begs his advice and assistance in making provision for their common sister."

(b) *If she be a wall, &c.* This is quite in accordance with the eastern mode of speech, which is so constantly by figure and parable. This younger sister is spoken of as a "wall," which they will add to, and adorn with silver turrets—alluding probably to her want of full-grown breasts. She is also spoken of as a "door," which they will improve by a wainscoat of cedar. In plain terms the meaning is that it shall be their care to promote the interests of this younger one, by providing her with a suitable dowry, when she shall come of age to be married.

It has been suggested that the term "little" might imply, not so much the tender age of this sister, as some personal defect or deformity under which she laboured, and which would prove a disadvantage to her in respect of marriage—which defect and disadvantage should thus be made up to her, and counter-balanced, by an ample endowment, represented by "silver turrets" and a "wainscoat of cedar."

(c) *Solomon hath a vineyard in Baal-Hamon, &c.* We are to suppose, as Bp. Percy remarks, that the Bride's vineyard lay contiguous to that of Solomon at Baal-Hamon ; which, according to Aben-Ezra, was a place near Jerusalem where abundance of people had vineyards (see Patrick). That, in some circumstances, a vineyard might be a very desirable acquisition to a Hebrew Monarch, we learn from the story of Naboth and Ahab.

Though it was usual among the Jews for the husband to endow his spouse with a sum of money at their marriage, yet the Bride also brought a portion to her husband.

TWELFTH CANTICLE.

PRACTICAL COMMENTS.

THE LITTLE SISTER—THE TRANSFER—THE LAST WORDS.

II.

THE LITTLE SISTER.

We have a little sister, and she hath no breasts : what shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for ? If she be a wall, we will build upon her a palace of silver ; and if she be a door we will inclose her with boards of cedar.—Chap. 8, v. 8, 9.

“ *We have a little sister, &c., what shall we do for her,*” &c.—We cannot but be struck with the *unselfishness* here shown by the Bride. Possessed of her Beloved’s affections, and united to him in marriage, her own cup was full, her own happiness complete. She might thus have wrapped herself up in her own privileges and blessings, forgetful and uncareful of the interests of others. But it is not so. In the midst of all her own blessedness she thinks of another, connected with her by ties of kindred and natural affection, and who, on account of her tender age and infirmities, is dependent upon her. She therefore mentions the case, the case of her “ little sister,” to *him*, who is now one with her ; and with whom she may claim a community of relationships and of interests. She asks him what shall be done for this “ little sister,” intimating a wish that she should be a partaker of similar blessings to her own ; and that a due provision should be made for her with a view to her future marriage.

This is illustrative of a very beautiful feature in the Christian character, viz., its *unselfishness* ; the interest which it takes in the welfare of others, and the sacrifices which it is

ready to make for their benefit, and especially for their *spiritual* benefit.

Such a disposition is frequently enjoined in the Gospel ; and Christians are exhorted to follow in this respect the example, which Christ has given them. “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others”—“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ”—“We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves—Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself”—“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus”—“For he hath left us an example, that we should follow his steps.”

Such is the unselfishness and charity of the true Christian character, as illustrated by the conduct of the Bride toward her “little sister.”

Help us to help each other, Lord,
Each other’s burden bear ;
Let each his friendly aid afford,
To soothe a brother’s care.

In giving an allegorical sense to this expression, “little sister,” most of the commentators apply it to the case of the Gentiles, as compared with that of the Jews, who first had the Gospel preached to them, and through whom it was afterwards communicated to the Gentiles. Taking this view of it we see what care the Church should have for the rest of the world, which is not yet included within its pale. It was by Christ’s own commandment that the Gospel, having first been preached to the Jews, was afterwards to be preached to the Gentiles. “Other sheep I have,” he said, “which are not of this fold,” i.e., of the Jewish, “them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice ; and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd.”

Matthew Henry's commentary on the place is as follows, “This may be understood as spoken by the Jewish Church concerning the Gentile world. God had espoused the Church of the Jews to himself, and she was richly endowed, but what shall become of the poor Gentiles ? ‘Their condition (say the pious Jews) is very deplorable and forlorn. They are our sisters ; what shall we do for them ?’ But now the tables are turned ; the Gentiles are betrothed to Christ, and ought to return the kindness by an equal concern for the bringing in of the Jews again.”

Thus the “little Sister,” whether denoting the case of the unconverted Gentiles, or of the unconverted Jews, must be duly attended to, and properly provided for ; and all necessary arrangements have accordingly been made for it in the Gospel marriage-covenant, the Covenant of grace.

II.

THE TRANSFER.

Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon ; he let out the vineyard unto keepers ; every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand pieces of silver. My vineyard, which is mine, is before me : thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred.—Chap. 8, v. 11, 12.

“*My vineyard,*” &c.—These verses receive light from our Saviour’s Parable of the Vineyard let out to Husbandmen. The vineyard was let to them as keepers, or tenants ; and they were to render its fruits in their season to the King.

Such a vineyard had Solomon in Baal-Hamon, which was also let out to husbandmen, or “keepers ;” who, however, instead of rendering the fruits in kind, were to render for the

vineyard a thousand pieces of silver, or a thousand shekels a year.

The Bride likewise had a similar vineyard of her own ; which, after her marriage, she transferred to Solomon. Or supposing that she should still retain the management of it in her own hands, yet it would only be in the character of a *steward*, and the fruits, or an equivalent, she would render to Solomon as the real Proprietor of the Vineyard.

This well represents the change, which takes place in our views and feelings after true conversion to Christ. We then see whose we really are, by creation, by redemption, and by regeneration. We then feel that we are "not our own, but are bought with a price, and are bound therefore to glorify God in our body and in our spirit, which are God's." It then appears to us that all we possess does not properly belong to ourselves ; but that we are only as *stewards*, and all these things are talents committed to our care for a short season ; to be used and improved in our Lord's service, and an account thereof to be rendered to him.

"Our great care," says M. Henry, "must be to pay our rent for what we hold of Christ's vineyard, and to see that we do not go behind-hand, nor disappoint the messengers he sends to receive the fruits. Thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and shalt have. The main of the profits belong to Christ ; to him and his praise all our fruits must be dedicated. If the owner of the vineyard have had his due, the keepers of it shall be well paid for their care and pains ; they shall have two hundred ; which sum, no doubt, was looked upon as good profit. Those that work for Christ are working for themselves, and shall be unspeakable gainers by it."

When I survey the wondrous Cross,
Whereon the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God ;
All the vain things that charm me most
I sacrifice them to his blood.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small ;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my life, my soul, my all.

Watts.

III.

THE LAST WORDS.

Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice ; cause me to hear it. Make haste, my Beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart on the mountains of spices.—Chap. 8, v. 13, 14.

“ *The companions hear thy voice ; cause me still to hear it.*” —The voice of the Bride is sweet to the Bridegroom’s ears. He desires to hear it always. So the voice of his Church and people, the voice of each individual believer, is sweet to the ear of Christ. He would hear it continually in prayer, in praise, in the preaching of his Gospel, in the confession of his name.

The voice of the Bride being heard by her companions may be taken to represent the “ communion of saints,” which is pleasant as well as profitable to them ; and which is also acceptable with God. Allusion is made to this, Malachi 2, v. 16, 17, “ Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another : and the Lord hearkened, and heard it ; and a

book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels ; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

The voice of the Bride, even in this respect, as addressed to her companions, and denoting the "communion of saints," is agreeable to the ears of the heavenly Bridegroom. But besides this, he desires to hear the Bride's voice directed immediately to himself. He delights in the prayers and praises of his Church and people, which come up as incense before him. He delights in the proclamation far and near of the "Gospel of peace," of the "glad tidings" of salvation. He delights in the faithful confession of his name.

Observe, says M. Henry, "1. Christ's friends should keep up a good correspondence one with another ; and as dear companions should speak often to one another, and hearken to one another's voice. They are companions in the kingdom and patience of Christ ; and therefore, as fellow-travellers, should keep up mutual freedom, and not be shy of, nor strange to, one another. 2. In the midst of our communion with one another we must not neglect our communion with Christ ; but let him see our countenance, and hear our voice. Note ; Christ not only accepts and answers, but even courts his people's prayers ; not reckoning them a trouble to him, but rather a delight ; as it is said, Prov. 15, v. 8, 'the prayer of the upright is his delight.'"

"*Make haste, my beloved,*" &c.—Such is the Bride's fervent wish. She desires above all things the Bridegroom's presence. If he should depart from her for a season, she cannot be happy until he return. Once before she had said, "turn, my Beloved, and be thou like a roe, or a young hart, on the

mountains of Bether." And here she says again, in very similar terms, "make haste, my Beloved, and be thou like to a roe, or to a young hart, on the mountains of spices."

Nothing will satisfy the renewed soul but the divine presence—"There be many that say, 'who will shew us any good?' Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us."

If the soul for a time be deprived of communion with God through Christ, it can find no rest; it walks no more in light, but in darkness; and instead of going on its way rejoicing, it must go mourning. At such seasons the earnest desire and prayer of Christians is that the presence of their God and Saviour may be restored to them; that his grieved Spirit may return; and that they may again enjoy the peace and comfort which was once theirs.

Return, O heavenly Dove, return,
Sweet messenger of rest !
I hate the sins, which made thee mourn,
And drove thee from my breast.

In this sense the Christian believer may say, "make haste, my Beloved"—"Forsake me not, O Lord; O my God, be not far from me. Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation."

But chiefest of all do Christians desire and look for their Saviour's return, not in spirit only, but in person—when he who "came once to visit us in great humility, shall come again in his glorious majesty"—when he shall "come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe in that day."

This return of the Redeemer, this second coming of Christ, this "glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ," forms now the chief hope and expectation of

the Church. To this she looks as the period of her "perfect consummation and bliss"—for this she longs, for this she waits, for this she prays—and when the Beloved of her soul says, as his last words in the inspired record, "Surely I come quickly ;" her own last words in reply are, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." "Make haste, my Beloved ; be thou like unto a roe, or to a young hart, upon the mountains of spices."